University of Alberta

Kathy Acker And The Hysterical Sublime: The Movements Of Technological Martyrdom, Grotesque Perversity, And Post-Freudian Aesthetics

by

Lynn Anne Adam

©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies And Research in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English
Department of Philosophy

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 2001

National Library of Canada
Acquisitions and Bibliographic Services
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada
Acquisitions et services bibliographiques
395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-60268-0

Canada

University of Alberta

Library Release Form

Name of Author: Lynn Anne Adam

Title of Thesis: *Kathy Acker And The Hysterical Sublime: The Movements Of Technological Martyrdom, Grotesque Perversity, And Post-Freudian Aesthetics*

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

Year This Degree Granted: 2001

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta Library to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis, and except as herein before provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatever without the author's prior written permission.

11236 69 Street, Edmonton, Alberta
T5B 1R5

Date submitted: April 11, 2001

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Kathy Acker And The Hysterical Sublime: The Movements Of Technological Martyrdom, Grotesque Perversity, And Post-Freudian Aesthetics* submitted by Lynn Anne Adam in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Supervisor: Dr. Christine Wiesenthal

Supervisor: Dr. Margaret Van de Pitte

Committee Member: Dr. Janice Williamson

Committee Member: Dr. Cressida Heyes

Committee Member: Dr. Doug Aoki

Committee Member: Dr. Dawne McCance

Date of approval (Supervisor): March 9, 2001

For Gilles Deleuze, whose work made a ruin of me.

Many thanks to Chris Wiesenthal, who held my hand and enabled this project to be completed, and Chrissy and Jessup, who always make me a home wherever they are.

Abstract

This interdisciplinary thesis reads Kathy Acker's work as a series of subcultural events which engage Freudian theory, technological horror, and sublime or grotesque materiality. Acker's alliance with American Cyberpunk, which is a movement that is primarily concerned with apocalypse, the body, and human devolution within late capitalism, is evident in the phantasmagoric bodies, metaphorical figures, and visual works of literature that she allows to be violently influenced by a number of cultural, technological and aesthetic disturbances that are common to cyberpunk, but for her, this is a hysterical and grotesque, feminist enterprise. In collective and individual performances of psychologically discursive, artistic, and delusional episodes of hysteria and masochism, Acker's saints and/or martyrs reiterate her texts' dislocations and dysfunctions. Therefore, the gestural and unpredictable nature of Acker's novels and characters complies with the hysterical sublime's influence upon all masochistic and perverse subjects that inhabit her post-apocalyptic or postmodern landscapes. Acker offers these characters a sadomasochistic and post-Freudian aesthetic as a strategy for survival and reconciliation, both in terms of the erasure of their individuality as well as the overwhelming presence of the hysterical sublime, by performing a poetics of death or a writing that testifies to the continuation of life and suffering.

Table Of Contents

Introduction:

Textual/Hysterical Movement, Queer Apocalypse And Cyberpunk.....1

Chapter I: (Re)Inventing The Hysterical Sublime.....18

Black Virgin Mary.....49

Chapter II: The Grotesque Teratology Of Aesthetic Expansion And Reduction.....98

The Miniature And The Gigantic: Grotesque Teratologies.....119

Opening The Uncanny.....123

The Criminal Grotesque.....126

Chapter III: Technological Hysteria: Ecstatic Saints And Martyrs.....134

The Martyr's Ill Body: Posthuman Suffering.....150

The Saintly Body: Literary Resurrection Or Transcendent Aesthetics.....166

Chapter IV: Three Principles Beyond Freudian Pleasure And Death.....174

Beyond The Freudian Beyond: Economies Of Pleasure.....178

First Principle: Lesbian Intercourse And The End of Sex.....186

Second Principle: The Pirate.....201

Third Principle: Pornology As Aesthetic Economy, Or Acker Does Sade To Death.....210

Conclusion: Writing As A Symptom Of Not Dying.....219

Bibliography.....235

Introduction: Textual/Hysterical Movement, Queer Apocalypse And Cyberpunk

The concept of "paraesthetics" is David Carroll's identification of the traits of marginal theories and practices of art that appear outside of the normative limits of more traditional aesthetic theories. Carroll also critically describes the character of this art as substantially "anti-theoretical" in its subversive curiosity (*Paraesthetics* xi), as a plastic activity and/or form which struggles "with and against" the established borders of aesthetic order or harmony (xviii). Avant-garde literature is yet another form of the extra-aesthetic for Carroll, a manifestation that he describes as the "para-literary" (21), and literature such as this is identically matched to a Nietzschean assertion of the "critical and combative use of art" (Carroll 22) as a *para-artistic* process of composition and/or compulsion. Kathy Acker's work is one particular version of this "paraesthetical" or "extra-aesthetic" activity or work (Carroll xiv), one that possesses an "improper, parasitical and transgressive" quality of *movement* originating from what Acker describes as "a gesture of power turned against itself" (Acker, *Re/search* 179), as well as a *convulsive*, "faulty, irregular, disordered, [and] improper" artistic hysteria which is characteristically recognized by its "contradictory, [and] disordered forms" which can only appear after "the end of art," argues Carroll (xiv). As a result, Acker's work "lays a trap for everyone and everything, for all theoretical discourses that attempt to penetrate, decipher, enclose, and master it" (Carroll 150). And power turned against itself, as Acker finds, becomes a creative, yet masochistic destructiveness in both its author's and character's *dis*-ease or dysfunction, and as such, Acker's Nietzschean

affirmation of absolute negativity or "ressentiment" is indeed, as Gilles Deleuze remarks, "a triumph of the weak as weak" (*Nietzsche* 117). This tendency towards a productive yet nihilistic affirmation of suffering leads into repetitious cycles of violence, solipsism and hysterical defense that are central motifs in her work.

This thesis is first, attentive to the movement of intertextual and hysterical themes and their artistic strategies as they appear in Acker's writing. This project also seeks to rehabilitate notions of the literary grotesque and its sublime foundations through a series of critical and theoretical examinations of Acker's monstrous and/or hysterical bodies as they are driven by perverse, sexual and artistic desires for both aesthetic *revelation* and *restitution*. The sublime constitution of deconstruction, as a postmodern and avant-garde technique, permits cyberpunk authors such as Acker to represent a number of broader implications of twentieth-century anxiety in the deformation of body, text and language. Finally, this thesis attempts to engage post-Freudian energies and structures in Acker's writing by tracing out the symptomological and technological movements of desire in her metaphorical, and masochistic, material presentation of postmodern characters and their bodies.

The first chapter of this thesis attempts to explore the connections between a distinctly feminine and hysterical form of *movement* in Acker's writing where the "formal material that the hysteric uses--movements that can describe a scene that is on display--are the same as the content of the symptom," as Monique David-Menard asserts (171). In "the [hysteric's] figuration of fantasies by projection onto motility," a

transference which operates in "the service" of a relegation of that which is "unactualizable," this hysteria cooperates with the transformation of the "subject" into "actor" or character (David-Menard 172) as per the postmodern sublime. David-Menard finds that hysterical "movement" compels one to "reread the Freudian energetics" behind hysteria by "reading a discourse on jouissance and the body as Reality" (158). In this rereading, jouissance is located at the final stage of analysis, but rather than examining this rather familiar concept in itself, I will turn towards a re-conceptualization of Freud's pleasure principle, as the traditional foundation of psychoanalytical desire, and at this point, respond to its renegotiation by Acker. My analysis, in this regard, continually attempts to navigate its way through a series of dualities: jouissance-effect and base-principle, Freud and Acker's literature, hysterical motivation and sublime substitution, and finally, the dual nature of suffering and ecstasy in both martyr and saint. And much in the same way that David-Menard examines the "two aspects of jouissance" that are "mystical and hysterical" in their natures (190), I also find that Acker simultaneously *elevates and depreciates* the hysterical or grotesque body within its sublime context or environment. Further, my reading of this desire and its aesthetic nuances is definitely characterized by what David-Menard argues is a "difficulty" in the conceptualization of "the dimension of movement that is involved in hysterical symptoms." As a result, the "unending twists and turns of this theme can [only] be spotted in diverse texts," such as those that Acker has composed (135). The paraesthetical movement of hysterical symptoms in literary processes, texts and

characters, when combined with postmodern, avant-garde techniques of sublime and artistic production, creates a form of *spasmodic* and *terrible* catharsis, I would argue. And the "disaster of forms" that Acker constructs proceeds according to what Lyotard describes as a "logic of the worst" or "at least an aesthetics of the worst," where the ugly, the "amorphic" and the "anti-landscape exceeds the realm of forms" through a "perverse interest" ("The Interest" 129). Here, whatever the "sublime manages to schematize" in terms of the "nonfigurable," in either immaterial or excessive compositions, comes about at the "cost of a transcendental disfiguration" or "a de-schematization of the world" (Rogozinski 146). Therefore, my first analysis sets out a theoretical foundation, in its advancement of an effeminate version of sublime representation and hysterical defense for the critical expositions to follow. In the remaining three chapters, the invasion of the technological, the psychological landscapes of alienation, and the avant-garde revisioning of aesthetic principles of pleasure and death, work towards producing a central concern, on my part, with Acker's post-apocalyptic after-effects and artistic disturbances. Where hysteria *moves* the textual and aesthetic body, the sublime "discovers" a "primitive space prior to phenomena but already differentiated, dissymmetrical, heterogeneous, traversed by fractures and rendered uneven by reliefs," concludes Jacob Rogozinski, and this is "the space proper" for the "primordial orientation" of this body, as well as the novelistic space of a technologically deformed grotesque such as Acker's writing possesses (153). And further, at the time when the "Freudian psychotic and neurotic hail from an age of

stifling interpersonal intimacy" (Sussman 3), and a classification of disease arises as a "condition of repression," I read Acker's resurrection of Freud's disempowered hysteric and/or vulnerable masochist as an attempt to aesthetically validate grotesque sites of "textual struggle in which Woman, Arab, and CUNT are complicit aspects of the Other as an unspeakable body," as Penelope Ironstone-Catterall concludes (175). In the end, Acker's preconditions for hysterical and sublime restitution are "anti-dialectical" forms of masochism or "negativity as negativity of the positive" (Deleuze 198), as well as awe-*ful* eruptions of personal and universal enlightenment.

In my second and third chapters, a developmental occurrence in Acker's utilization of the material (or metaphorical) body of the grotesque produces her women characters as evident or legible bodies/scripts of hysteria and abjection. Additionally, her treatment of this body's technological transformation within the postmodern sublime creates a variety of metamorphoses that reproduce the suffering flesh of the martyr's corpse into the disembodied saint's corpus of ecstatic, textual desire.

Keith Ansell Pearson's analysis of the postmodern's fascination with the technological sublime suggests that this "belated `return' to the question of technology" causes philosophical inquires concerning its nature to become "infected" by the perplexities that appear "in the face of the sheer monstrous otherness of the question and the confusion it generates" (4). I will also contend that the "self-comprehension and engineering" of both grotesque form and perverse existence in Acker are the aesthetic result of these perplexities or confusion. As I investigate her technologically

sublime perpetuation of aesthetic *un*ease, I will do so in accordance with a rhizomatic methodology, rather than a "top-down philosophical determination (and obfuscation)," utilizing a "technical [or] (diagrammatic) study of its actual and specific engineerings and bottom-up processes of spontaneous self-organization" (Ansell Pearson 183), as a more organically sensitive mode of interpretation.

The resurgence of "grand narratives" of "a distinctly inhuman character" in postmodern literature, in general, offer "a plethora of apocalyptic scenarios concerning an alleged phase-space transition to a new, `higher' level of evolution," one which can only occur within an environment of "neg-entopic" disasters or "destinies," concludes Ansell Pearson (148). Acker's uncanny fascination with criminal or marginal bodies and practices, for example, initiates *expansionist and reductionist* transitions or transformations in her advancement of the grotesque or the monstrous, creating either gigantic characters and concepts or exceedingly tiny robots, parasites or sentences. In Acker's *Empire Of The Senseless*, Joseph Tabbi finds there is the most concise examples of her denial of the body's necessary "organic space" in the ordinary life-world, offering, instead "whole stretches of the postmodern city" that "are no longer even walkable" (22). In spaces such as these, I would emphatically agree that the "desired body of the Other" that Acker represents, is ""veiled" by the signifiers of otherness" which appear "tattooed as stigmata upon it" (Ironstone-Catterall 176).

As "a novelist of the generation after Pynchon," Acker's "self-consciousness and postmodern irony" illustrates the way in which a late-modern strategy that was "once

useful for debunking illusions," has now become "poisonous" (Tabbi 9). And Acker's postmodern (re)representations of reality must now show how the routine "abstraction" of grotesque or sublime incomprehensibility becomes a "feeling" (Tabbi 10) of hysterical energy. "The sublime persists as a powerful emotive force in postmodern writing," argues Tabbi, "especially in American works that regard reality as something newly mediated, predominantly, by science and technology" (xi). As a "participant" in this "powerful counter-current in twentieth-century American writing," Acker's work successfully pushes "beyond the limits of the literary" in order to bring her "writing into contact with a nonverbal technological reality" through a utilization of what Tabbi describes as a "technological aesthetic" (xi). The mechanistic imperatives that simultaneously *underwrite yet overwrite* Acker's texts and/or textual bodies are evidently a result of an "increasingly frequent figuration of technology as an outward embodiment of thought," a grotesque embodiment that moves "narrative away from romantic and modernist pre-occupations with order, autonomy and organic models of wholeness" (Tabbi 21) into the realm of the sublime. Here, Tabbi's description of "technological mechanism" reinforces the "aesthetic embodiment where mind and world are neither opposed nor merged," and the stasis of this tension, as Acker depicts it, is both the moment of the body's hope for ecstatic transcendence, as well as its resignation to suffering chaotic and persistent violence and brutality. In the transition from the early 1900s in America when writers were concerned with the possibility that machines could "invade an American garden," a twentieth-century fear developed towards

"systems [that could] proliferate out of control" (Slade 28). The appearance of a distinct, literary ambivalence towards machines and the technological threat they posed occurred relatively early in American modernism, and this ambiguity is evident in the work of Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald and Crane, argues Joseph Slade. Usually, it took on the form of "a sidestepping of the issue" of the "man-machine discontinuity" (Slade 44), and these early "deflections" developed into more complex, schizophrenic bifurcations in avant-garde experimentation in the twentieth-century, where the "metaphorical contradictions" between portrayals of starkly mechanized ways of life become "inhumanly respectable" in their depictions, and the writer's personal vision of mechanical empowerment is vividly portrayed in the human embodiment of the machine's strength, "truth and beauty" (Slade 46). My third chapter, therefore, is an analysis of the technological sublime's effect upon the development of the suffering of ecstatic martyrs in Acker's texts who desire saintly forms of transcendence from this inhumane and mechanical way of life. The final, familiar evaporation of these character's textual bodies and voices emphasizes the transcendently immanent impossibility of what Keith Ansell Pearson proposes as a *transhuman* metamorphosis because Acker's aggressive disintegration of language and reality promote the "immanence of the subject" by permitting all bodies in her texts to be "opened up, [or] broken into" in "a rigor, [and] a transcendence" (MacKendrik 155). For Acker's martyrs and saints, the "discipline of self-overcoming" or hysterical "asceticism" that they seek to undertake, is carried "to a perverse extreme, overcoming even life where it stands in

the way of the will" (MacKendrik 82).

The fourth chapter offers an investigation of the more perverse, Freudian pleasures that Acker reinscribes into a repetitive series of literary methodologies and anti-aesthetic imperatives which are subject to the influence of the hysterical sublime. Again, as is the case with my previous chapters, Freud's influence in Acker's work is a persistent undercurrent. Acker's staunch refusal of Freudian ideology and its philosophical/psychological classification of women, criminals, and children, allows their uncanny presences to produce hysterical and perverse bodies within her writing, engaging Freud's theoretical stereotypes, accessing his psychoanalytical criteria, and exemplifying his classical characteristics of psychosis and neurosis in her auto-biographical hesitations and fictive obsessions. There is "something," writes Henry Sussman, that "happens over time, both in the possibilities for literary surrogation and in the scenarios of psychological activity and interpretation [that are] rehearsed with such uncanny comprehensiveness by Freud" (5) which allows both an aesthetics and a writing of difference to "transpire under the dull illuminations of rhetoric and psychology" (26). Further, even Freud's "neuroses" are "themselves endowed with character, if nothing else," asserts Sussman (47), and their ability to materialize in Acker's writing as "localized instances of a system gone awry" (Sussman 193), provide evidence of their propensity toward hysterical and artistic signification, as well as other psychological representations of the "grandiose" in the "structural indeterminacy" of the human mind (Sussman 194). Finally, when "texts, like bodies, store up memories of past fears, [and]

of distant traumas," as Judith Halberstam suggests (19), the circular pathway of Acker's anti-aesthetic winds its way back into the hysterical realm of masochistic creativity. But the major distinction between Acker and Freud is still a concrete one: it can be seen in the delineation between a modernist 's recognition of the sublime, one which understands the "powerlessness of the faculty of presentation," versus a postmodern's utilization of the aesthetic "power of the faculty to conceive" that which cannot present itself. In this way, both sublime and libidinal desires are "assembled" (Deleuze, Guattari qtd in Ansell-Pearson 71) by Acker to reflect a perverse sublimity, and Freud's "beyond" of both the pleasure and the reality principle implements the creative destructiveness of the death-drive, as well as a potential for a "radical transformation" (Ansell Pearson 71) of art and existence within the scope of the technological sublime. In her fascination with the "body and its voluminous fragmentary histories," as well as this body's extinction once it ceases "to be meaningful as a standard for measurement or symbolic comprehension" (Tabbi 22), Acker also allows Freud's therapeutic imperatives to be read or recognized. The textual tendencies of what Tabbi describes as a "technological aesthetic" (xi) are discursive "symptoms of the overabundance of signification, in the world and on the page," in Acker's novels, an excess that gives "way to an all but irrepressible heteroglossia," and a complexity which always indicates the presence of the sublime (16). Tabbi argues that work such as Acker's is not only a "dystopian expression of a cultural narcissism" intermingled with "the oncoming hegemony of the machine," but also a response to "the crisis of representation" which

is characteristically a part of a literary movement called "cyberpunk" (213). "Cyberpunk" possesses "an aesthetic suited to the excesses and economic hubris of the Reagen era," argues Tabbi (213), and both its avant-garde texts and strategies "stylistically celebrate" all "networks larger than life and circuits smaller than sight" as they are contained within "the reproductive system of multinational capitalism's viral contamination" of the human body and mind (215). The "cyberpunk hero" is therefore, "doomed to alternate" between "personal identity and impersonal salvation," asserts Tabbi, and between "alienation and loss of self within the single, unthinkably complex system of world information," finally existing only as an "aggressively fragmented individual at war" with the "capitalist totality" (216). This hero is typically

> a self-destructive but sensitive young protagonist with an (implant/prosthesis/technical talent) that makes the evil (megacorporations/police states/criminal underworlds) pursue him through (wasted urban landscapes/elite luxury enclaves/eccentric space stations) full of grotesque (haircuts/clothes/self-mutilations/rock music/sexual hobbies/designer drugs/tele-techtronic gadgets/nasty new weapons/ exteriorized hallucinations) representing the (mores/fashions) of modern civilization in terminal decline, [who] ultimately hooks up with rebellious and tough talking (youth/artificial intelligence/rock cults) who offer...transcendental vision...against the spectre of world-subverting...evil genius. (Csicsery-Ronay qtd in Tabbi 217)

And although this hero is usually male, "Acker is certainly not the only and probably not

the first certified postmodernist to engage with cyberpunk" while directly promoting a "peculiar twist" to its "masculinist forms" (Tabbi 220). Acker's peculiarly feminine version of sublimity is accompanied by her "mostly first-person-stream-of-consciousness narrative," a form that resists or rejects any "melodramatic presentation" of the apocalyptic sublime (Tabbi 220). And finally, her "aggressively obscene, visceral language" successfully returns the reader to "the reality--and repressed dangers--of direct bodily experience,"qualifying her literary resistance as a critical method that "strips power of its mystique," providing "a conceptual unification and release" for both character and reader "into sensual [textual] freedom" (Tabbi 222).

As a writer concerned with the links between "violence" and "representations of apocalypse," I woulad argue that Acker is directly influenced by a broader manifestation of the "apocalypse of the imagination," a phenomenon that undermines programs and systems of "political change and cultural reform," while promoting a strategic literature in the face of "an oppositional politics" in the 1960s until the 1980s in the U.S. (Wilson Carpenter 109). These stylistic characteristics accompany a series of psychological and physiological encounters with technology, hysteria, and the sublime in Acker's novels. When the machines that construct her narrative, or the machinery of her narration itself, become "disturbingly lively," the reader, author and character contained therein (or engaged with these assemblages) becomes transformed into a "frighteningly inert," fictive space (Haraway qtd in Tabbi 21). The function of autobiography, and what Tabbi argues is "the projection of the self and its immediate

sense experience into an autonomous sphere of thought," become a series of hysterically motivated and grotesquely substantial attempts, on Acker's part, to merge "literary self-creation" with "technological transcendence" (3). Acker's literary playfulness within this bifurcated universe of aesthetic indifference and self-interested compulsiveness, can be directly linked to the influence of William Burroughs. Burroughs' "thoroughly apocalyptic" work enlists a "queer" set of tropes or themes, argues Richard Dellamora, in order to depict "an errant "I"" that stumbles in "to exotic locales in search of an elusive, ultimate intoxication," while being "condemned to psychic and physical disintegration" (*Apocalyptic* 103). In Acker's ambiguous depictions of lesbianism, for example, the subtextual presence of a "Freudian analysis, as yet another mode of technology" appears to operate identically to Burroughs' male versions of homosocial frustration and dysfunction. Here, his queer ambiguity orogoinates from a "lack [of] an erotics," a loss of "a concept of minority sexual identity," and the non-existence of any "readily available way in which to validate desire for sexual and emotional ties with other men" (Dellamora 114). This causal relation qualifies both the general errancy of the "I," as well as the particular Otherness of the queer subject. In both Burroughs and Acker, a typically Freudian ambiguity, in terms of the perverse impulses towards homosexual symbolization, allows them to specifically "locate perversity" in "aesthetic discourses" which abstract "homosexuality into a generalized linguistic transgression" (Dellamora 158). In fact, Burroughs's position as "a queer without benefit of knowledge of what a sexual minority might be,"

creates a pervasive "absence" in his work that can be qualified as homosexually "apocalyptic" (*Postmodern* 137). This homosexual apocalypse also haunts Acker's writing, providing depictions, on the one hand, of lesbianism as the queer *dead-end* of heterosexual generation, or, on the other hand, as the obsessive-compulsive illness of abject marginality which becomes sensually terminated in a subject's repetitive desire for masturbatory suicide.

The fragmentation of this queer and terminal subject becomes influential in terms of the corpus of the text itself, and in a manner identical to Burroughs, Acker also ventriloquizes and "cuts up" her texts by "splicing, overlapping, and distorting" the "physical handling of language," as Robin Lyndenberg suggests is true of Burroughs (413). Both writers avidly participate in the "scandal of writing," a creative method of experimentation which exposes "the effects of the unconscious at work" or "in labour" as "a metaphor for all textual deployment" (Lyndenberg 414). The basic presence and/or function of technology in such scandalous work "provides both the metaphor for the falsity of the self and the literal mechanism for an escape from that constricting identity," concludes Lyndenberg (420). Both Burroughs' and Acker's deployment of *technologically interested* forms of fragmentary, textual "escape" access and produce "the language of dreams" alongside of "the speech of some schizophrenics" (Lyndenberg 431). Burroughs' characterization of language as an "alien" invader that trespasses upon first, the human mind, and later, the body, is also an acceptance of the idea that "interiority means intrusion and colonization," while "self-identity is ultimately

a symptom of parasitic invasion" (Shaviro, "Two Lessons" 40). As a result, the only forms of "reproduction" that occur in either Burroughs or Acker's work are the viral contagions or spores that characterize aggressive systems of meta-language and sublime representation. The symptomatic nature of text, discourse and image in Acker's work, in particular, is a gestural signpost that can lead the reader to decipher the schizophrenic interiority of the grotesque and sublime content of such a text. "The symptoms of a virus are the attempts of the body to deal with the virus attack," and as a result, "by their symptoms you shall know them" (Burroughs qtd in Shaviro 42-3). This symptomatic revelation occurs within a self-reflexive environment, one where each text's "linguistic utterance" consequentially generates "a symptom" (Shaviro 43) that is encrypted yet reservedly revealed.

Where Shaviro finds that "everything in Burroughs' fiction is resolved into and out of a spinning asshole, which is also finally a cosmic black hole" ("Two Lessons" 45), I would argue that everything in Acker's fiction is vacuously sucked into the abysmal vagina of the maternal grotesque. And as is common in the reading of "postmodern texts," in general, those novels which compel the reader "to blunt" his or her "faculty of being shocked by the cruelty they display," for the reader of Acker there is a simultaneous experience of entertainment in contradiction with sublime repulsion in the grotesque "end" (Meindl 173) of her narratives and characters. The "instability" of this "black humour" is consequentially found in "the deeper horror of postmodern fiction," a terrible vision which offers up a "blackness" that "tends to escape us" in its

sublime retreat (Meindl 174). And as vivid examples of the "latest flowering of the American literary grotesque," Acker's and Burroughs' dark comedies are examples of the *stalemate* between "a moral and a humorous perspective," as well as the *mediation* "between absurdist postwar fiction (the grotesque for the sake of the grotesque) and postmodernism," where the "grotesque exposes reality as referable to language (the linguistic grotesque)" (Meindl 211). In the "continuity of experimentalism" in both of these writers' works, "the Other, short of being rejected or assimilated" is "both attractive and somewhat forbidding" in its grotesqueness, concludes Meindl (213).

This thesis cannot simply proclaim its status as an interdisciplinary project without explanation or qualification. In attempting to remain philosophically attentive to the aesthetic, metaphysical and existential themes in Acker's novels, I have also struggled to remain faithful to the critical nuances of text and discourse that are so important to literary interpretation. But I find that the eccentricities of my analysis create, as if in imitation of the conceptual and aesthetic grotesque, a theoretical and parasitical *boundary figure* or *hybrid reading* which possesses both the strengths and the hesitations of a performative, interdisciplinary consideration of theory and text, in general. Nonetheless, I have attempted to "let the impact of positive figurations of difference," and what can be seen as their negative counterparts in Acker's work, lead me "out of the epistemological haze into the generative" (and degenerative) "void of a post-human universe" (Lykke and Braidotti 249). This project has been a struggle for me, on a number of fronts. And even at what seems to be the end of this frustrating yet

enriching journey through Acker's work, I find that *"there's still more to say."*

The texts I have chosen to examine out of Acker's work offered the *strongest* themes and examples of experimentation, and they are interconnected with one another because of their involvement with specific figures and philosophical meditations that arise out of the sublime, collective characteristics that reflect and repeat central tenets in my analysis. But these texts also possessed a *mid-life* strength as well, a more mature energy that is the best yet most difficult aspects of her work as a radical thinker and writer.

Unlike others who have written about Acker, such as David Brande and Penelope Ironstone-Catterall, I have provided a broader, aesthetic evaluation of Acker's writing through microcosmic and macrocosmic processes of theoretical and critical developments in her literature. Both Brande and Ironstone-Catterall are fascinated with the rhizomatic ornateness of Acker's stylistic or political radicality, often fixing their sights on a single text and promoting one, thematic critique. Despite the quick connections I make between larger philosophical or psychological themes of sublimity and hysteria, I have hopefully given the smaller aesthetic *symptoms* of Acker's sexual and linguistic systems an enthusiastic reading of those assemblages or artifacts of desire and metonymy that arise out of the intensity of the marginal and perverse forms of creative expression that her work advances.

Chapter I: (Re)Inventing The Hysterical Sublime

> You're always going somewhere, you always end up somewhere. You want to be surprised. That's what I like, all writers like. To have that sense of wonder. (Acker, *Hannibal* 23)

> In brief, the tree becomes an executioner and a victim at one and the same time, signing itself and bleeding to death from the very moment that the woodcutter, after making off with one of its branches, turns it into an *aitch*, a hatchet with which he then tries to cut down the tree. The eyes of the tree "fasten on the hatchet, the aitch held by the woodsman and it recognizes, in the brand new handle of the hatchet, this aitch, the wood of the branch that was removed in the first place." What comes back to cut the tree, and then put it to death, is thus part of the tree, a branch, a son, a handle, a piece detached from the tree which writes, which writes itself on itself. (Derrida qtd in Ulmer, *Teletheory* 231)

> The flesh must be the mind. (Acker, *In Memoriam* 118)

Hysteria is recognized in its gestural symptoms, and these material signs, in Acker's work, possess a sublime potential for aesthetic growth and artistic expression. Additionally, in its appearance as a psychological and intellectual crisis in "the written and writing figure of knowledge and desire caught between recognition and terror" (Ender 267), hysteria is an evident coordinate of the sublime. When these two movements are brought together, one gestural and masochistic, and the other, traumatic

and awe-inspiring, the foundation for an advancement of a radical and heterogeneous aesthetic in Acker's work is constructed. While aesthetic interconnections between trauma and composition are advanced by Acker in her writing, the distinctions between either state are also maintained.

Both hysteria and the sublime play "a crucial role within the masochistic scenario" because together, they undermine "all representation," effectively marking out "the point toward which aesthetic and religious practices strive," while nevertheless "undoing them" (Stewart, *Sublime* 55). In Acker's writing, the "masochistic scenario" is fundamentally grounded in the sublime because it is intimately "connected to the strange Freudian boundary concept of sublimation," a process which transforms libidinal drives into a "path of expression," rather than producing a total "repression" (Stewart 55). The relationship between hysteria and masochism also offers a secondary translation of defense, trauma and libido, creating conceptual and figural recombinations of metaphoric representation on the basis of the connection between masochism and the sublime, and allowing libidinal forms of artistic creativity to become viable. Hysteria's inclusion into the formula of sublimation and repression allows the experimental work of deconstruction to occur within the scope of the hysterical sublime. Substantial depictions of the female dis-ease of hysteria in Acker's work unify postmodern crises of sublime incomprehensibility with structures of masochistic survival and testimonial, providing both the impetus, and the method, for the development of a hysterical aesthetics. At this point I will qualify my use of the term "postmodern" as one

that places an emphasis on intentionality in Acker's aesthetic approaches and preoccupations with impending apocalypses and their "post" periods, and in this understanding and utilization of the concept, I am referencing Fredric Jameson's description of the postmodern as being absent "of any Utopian celebration" (*Postmodernism, Or* 56), and engaged with post-structuralist critique (of which deconstruction is a primary discursive model), and finally, as a contemporary movement existing "all around us" which appears "as the promise of the return and the re-invention" of "a regenerated modernism" (60). But as slippery and mysterious as the sublime or the grotesque, the postmodern is incredibly difficult to absolutely define because, as Jameson asserts, "we are within the culture of postmodernism to the point where its facile repudiation is as impossible as any equally facile celebration of it as complacent and corrupt" (62). And postmodern theory generally behaves much in the same way as Acker's texts, as "a ceaseless process of internal rollover in which the position of the observer is turned inside out and the tabulation re-continued on some larger scale" (Jameson 64). For the purposes of this analysis, I see the postmodern as both an aesthetic foundation for Acker's literary visions, as well as a cultural/theoretical setting in her portrayal of the degeneration of modernist idealism.

As a theoretical *environment*, the hysterical sublime becomes apparent in each and every detail of the hysterical bodies and strategies that Acker's writing illustrates. However, her sense of wonder at what she encounters in the journey of writing is indicative of a personal affirmation of a sublime *moment of composition*. Her loss of

rational certainty in an experience of the sublime is a loss she *willing* accepts in order to invoke a darker vision and a stronger creative impetus towards nihilistic prediction. Acker's evaluation is not the sublime experience that Edmund Burke describes, one where the subject of the sublime is a terrified victim who is held fast by the magnitude of its power. But, in both Acker and Burke's concept of the sublime, the subject is absolutely engulfed by a transcendentally immediate awareness which is simultaneously *wonderful* and *awe-ful*. Acker's literary representations attempt to aestheticize this terrible yet magnificent idea of the sublime, and as a result, her depictions are similar to philosophical analyses of the sublime as it has existed *out there* in traditional, philosophical accounts. This natural sublime, in contrast to Acker's literary sublime, is a phenomenon that sadistically *grasps* its subject in visual, psychological, and intellectual ways, by subsuming her body and forcing a surrender of her intellectual will. In Acker's evaluation of the sublime, both a cognitive *over-extension* and a metaphoric *exaggeration* literarily appears in the bodies of her characters and texts.

Hysteria, as a sister-category to the literary implementation of the sublime that Acker undertakes, also offers an alternative means of artistic expression, one that places subjects into hysterical and/or masochistic relationships of tension and ambiguity within the text. For Acker, certain conditions are necessary for an artist or character's hysterical temperament to bloom. First, reality must become displaced into a more sublime dimension of thought and action, a setting where both terror and fascination act as guiding principles for all conscious life. And second, the pain and trauma of the

hysteric's shattered psyche must precede, and then modify, her responses to the sublime threat that surrounds her. Textual settings such as these may seem identical to Burke's descriptions of the natural sublime, but for Acker, these landscapes allow a greater variety of terrible illuminations to occur. And sublime *insights*, when they occur in her work, perpetuate a variety of physical and technological metamorphoses in hysterical subjects. For example, when the character of Abhor experiences the shock of the natural sublime, she reacts in an hysterical way to the magnitude of both universal and particular threats of destruction: "One moment would be dark as if the sky was bruised and the next moment was lightning flashes, [and] thunder booms," she says. Then this trauma is followed by a state of "total confusion," and Abhor becomes unsure whether or not she "was in a nightmare" because "the sky was the pain inside" her body (*Empire* 176).[1] Hysterical modes of creativity that Acker employs and allows for her characters are *dysfunctionally functional* modes of expression, those cathartic yet destructive desires that move towards radically different forms of composition. In the grotesque *dis-representation* of the mystery that constitutes the sublime, Acker's hysterical masochists give plastic form to their suffering by creating *monuments or moments* that graphically portray the sublime as both *inside and outside of* consciousness. As a correlate to this kind of creation, Acker's writing depicts a series of

---

[1]All Acker's novels, articles or essays will be abbreviated in the main body of my text. *In Memoriam To Identity*, *Empire Of The Senseless*, and *Pussy, King Of The Pirates*, for example, will take on abbreviated forms of their lengthier titles, e.g. *In Memoriam*, *Empire*, and *Pussy*.

experiments with avant-garde, autobiographical and fictional expressions of grief, disillusionment and *dis*-ease. Wherever Acker's autobiographical paper-doll Kathy appears, the textual shadow of her authorial *corpse* is also present, and as a metaphoric form of hysterical conversion, this character's masochistically-charged constitution veils an equally hysterical set of energetic processes, on Acker's part. In total, the dynamic system between author and work results in the production of a body of literature that *moves hysterically* and *thinks masochistically*. Acker's is a painful and hysterical *making* of *art* through consistent reconstructions of the sublime that produce *supernatural* characters within overblown psychological and geographical contexts.

For Acker, this *re-invention* of the sublime arose out of a desire for aesthetic *expansiveness*. This was a desire that forwarded her artistic utilization of the *symptoms* of hysteria which first, become evident in the raw and brutal surfaces of her early work. In texts such as *Portrait*, the extremely experimental breaks in narrative logic usurp the cohesiveness between temporal action and character, or, alternately, deformed and repetitive blocks of text persistently assert another order of signification. However, in her later work, the *orgiastic delirium* of traumatic production which seeks to construct *awe-ful* or apocalyptic visions, texts, and narratives exhibits a concern with the continual unfolding of broader, sublime themes, while providing a consistent fascination, on her part, with the many shapes and sizes of deformity in language, thought and body. This delirious oscillation between micro-and-macrocosmic attentiveness is a central characteristic of novels such as *Pussy*, or *My Mother*, for example. And therefore,

Acker's re-invention is a also a re-negotiation of traditional theories of the sublime within the borders of the development of a radically different kind of literature. Re-invention is based upon her re-conceptualization of the experience and the effects of the sublime, and this structural activity, one which re-conceptualizes the manifestations of hysteria into the traumatic material of the sublime, also attempts to reclaim what remains of individual memory or identity through forms of transcendental nomadism. However, this strategy presents a series of literal and rational challenges to the form and content of Acker's work. As her novels and characters attempt to "overcome art" in performances that effectively "insubordinate words," a "*détournement*" occurs (Ulmer 199), and this produces an instability in the understandable development of narrative action and character. Acker's characters become dispossessed wanderers who become engulfed within the darkness of late capitalism's apocalyptic street life, and these nomadic figures find they are progressively lead to a point where they must openly confront the terror of sublime destruction and/or extermination by the lethargic conclusion of their open-ended narratives or lives. As psychologically damaged subjects who have experienced sublime loss and survived, these nomads also recognize that they must attempt to overcome art through an inconsistent deconstruction of the "nostalgia" (Ulmer 199) of a past they can never reclaim. This world is one where "theory doesn't work" (*Empire* 113), and existence is understood to be only a continuum of pain and trauma which complies with a more general script or "map of rigidities," a universal cartographic route which illustrates the way that all "feeling" has

been erased and the "wrongness" of the universe has caused all things to "stop" (*Pussy* 38). This is also a bleak world of "interchangeable puppets," writes Acker, where the "autonomous social mechanisms of social repression" are "inevitably reproduced in every individual" (*Hannibal* 58).

Traditionally, in the psychoanalytical oscillation between the unveiling of a hysteric's trauma and her shrouding of that which is obscure, she learns to live "beyond despair" (Boothby 412). But in Acker's texts, however, the hysteric adopts a masochistic acceptance of existence as a *constant state of despair* because rather than consciously acknowledging her trauma, Acker's hysteric ultimately chooses to live like an outlaw in order to survive, instinctually following "abstract maps of spiritual visions" or "records of the 'other' world" to indistinct locations of sublime annihilation and trauma (*Empire* 140). Despite Airplane's desire to heal herself, for instance, the conditions for her recovery are nonexistent. And as a result, she hysterically *refuses* to participate in the everydayness of the world, saying, "If the world in which you live is sick, you have to live in the imaginary" (*In Memoriam* 141). The hysteric's withdrawal, like Airplane's refusal, forecloses on her desire to "represent" her body in reality, and instead, makes it necessary for her to withdraw inside this kind of "diseased" imaginary (Foale 93).[2]

---

[2] For Joan Copjec, hysteria is "a disease of the imagination," or "of the production of images cut off from the natural" (qtd in Foale 93), and the consequences of this production assigns an authorial responsibility to the hysteric's "forgoing" of a representation of her own or "possible" body in the way that she begins "telling herself stories." In her desire "to function solely in an imaginary realm, the hysteric forgoes

In the *somewhere yet nowhere* of Acker's texts, those interior spaces where all frightening revelations of the sublime are exposed, her characters appear as nightmarish manifestations of hysterical suffering and survival. The *symptoms* of postmodern uncertainty and fear provide Acker with the material gestures and signs that can *build* particular kinds of *sublime monuments*, and these monumental structures are identically matched to Burke and Kant's examples of the natural (or effeminate) sublime, as well as to William H. Gass' account of the "monumental" elements of a sublime, aesthetic experience. For Gass, "the monumental makes crowds, gathers tourists, unites a people, but it will send each one away like the suitor who failed the riddle" because the "fear of being overwhelmed, invaded, [or] changed (which I mentioned as the magnetism, [or] the magic of the monumental)" is too great (Gass qtd in Ulmer 198). In the sublime, the disruptive energy that threatens to usurp intellectual comprehension is directly linked to the activity of the imagination. Acker's "twists" of language cause a fear to arise, in both her reader and her characters, of being "overwhelmed, invaded, [and] changed," and her "ability to blur distinctions between observer and observed, reader and text, or spectator and event" (Freeman 5), provoke forceful and energetic disruptions in the interpretation of her work. This sublime style of writing borrows from the powerful unpredictability of the natural sublime, and is

---

the representation of a possible body--her body," concludes Foale (93). Acker's hysterical representation of characters who refuse to represent their own bodies is also a story about Acker as an author and subject, I would argue.

therefore, similar to Longinus' example of "sublime oratory," which is a mode of discourse which exudes a "genuine power over language" and in "a flash of lightning," can strike the listener (Freeman 84).

Ronald Bogue and Marcel Cornis-Pope's description of representational violence asserts that it is a concept which "glamorizes/naturalizes conflict" (*Violence And Mediation* 2), and in their description of "crude plot-driven narratives of horror [that] collaborate with cunning postmodern re-presentations to create a permanent spectacle of violence," the violent characteristics of writing such as Acker's is addressed by way of a sublime concept. In *Great Expectations*, she describes her style of writing as a mixture of "simultaneous contrasts, extra-vagrancies, incoherences, half-formed misshapen thoughts, [and] lousy spelling." " What is the secret of this chaos?" she asks (107). The chaos of her work's secrets reflect the basic complexity of sublime representation as violent, horrific *and* enlightening visions, creating a style of presentation that must pose profound "questions about the nature and exertion of agency" (Freeman 6). Additionally, Acker's reconceptualization of protagonists as "subjects who exert will, even at the cost of self-destruction," suggests that they cannot merely be considered as "victims who are acted upon" (Freeman).

Interestingly, the monumental structure of Freud's propositions concerning hysteria utilized a similar, technical presentation. He created "grand theories, colossal structures, [and] breathtaking speculative leaps" in his theoretical writing, asserts Elaine Showalter (38), and both fascination and repulsion characterize Freud and Breuer's case

studies of hysterics. However, when "Breuer ran from this derangement of the body and language," it was "Freud [who] remained with his hysterics, indeed, identified himself as one of their company, and found a way to restrain, retrain, their passion and his by containing and homeopathically deploying it in language," argues Claire Kahane (16). The same masochistic speculation, scientific sadism, and autobiographical confession that typify Acker's fictive work, also produced moments of sublime (mis)understanding in Freud's. Alternately, the impasses in psychoanalytical theories and their structures, beginning with Freud, became translated into uncanny, material occurrences such as those that haunt Acker's texts. In Airplane's case, Freud's basic recognition of the complexity of the unconscious mind produces a more personal recognition that her "body and the architecture which is both physical and mental is more immense, [and] fabulous" than she ever "knew or imagined" (*In Memoriam* 233).

Symptomatic-reaction formation grounds the characteristics of Freud's aetiological and archeological theories and/or inquiries concerning the meaning and origin of hysterical conversion. Such conversion became possible only when symptomatic *narration* had occurred. And as a result, the *meaning* of hysteria, as Showalter argues, is presented by an erratic writing machine that can only produce a variety of sublime after-effects in both Freud's hypotheses and the hysteric's communication. In *Hystories*, Showalter's analysis of the connection between writing, narration and hysteria finds that "Freud believed [that] the nature of the story" itself "dictated the form." "Hysterics were unable to tell a "smooth and exact" story about

themselves" because they "left out, distorted, and rearranged information," and their "incapacity to give an "ordered history of their life" was not simply characteristic of hysterics--it was the *meaning* of hysteria" itself, she argues (84). Similarly, Acker's writing continually emphasizes the embodied situation of the hysteric as one who finds herself trapped *inside* of her autobiographically incoherent *story*. And because hysteria's strong defense-system necessitates the containment of this subject, the eventual production of hysterical narrative exhibits a marked inability, on the part of the subject, to depict her experience of this painful form of embodiment. In the strange existence of the hysteric as *both I and not-I*, is a story with a subject who can barely narrate at all, and cannot effectively compose. Therefore, the process of hysterical writing, for Acker and her characters, is an autistic challenge which is based, fundamentally, upon an experience of sublime dislocation:

> To write is not to record or represent a given action, but to lose one's capacity to be the subject or initiator of that action. I lose myself, in putting down memories, in writing, but I don't escape the fatality of the events...What happens to me happens to no one...I am no longer able to participate in transformation: stuck; stuck in prison; pain. (*In Memoriam* 256)

In this passage, Acker's own sense of isolation is enhanced by the inescapable reality of her existential pain. And this becomes a literary impetus for her textual representations of loss and trauma.

Meanwhile, for Freud, the hysterical manifestations of "physical pain" should

convert into *mental* pain" [his emphasis] (*Studies* 237-8). Yet for Acker and her characters, mental and physical pain are separate occurrences, either an external, sadistic or physical pain, or a masochistic strategy of self-denial and withdrawal. For the character of Rimbaud, these two kinds of pain seem to progress from a series of "cold knives" into a "city of knives all of which are interior and stick into the ice of the mind" (*In Memoriam* 9), allowing both forms to conjoin as per a more general sense of alienation.

"Hysterical pain," writes Monique David-Menard, "is not a mathematical ideality" but more "the material element of a language" that "supports another type of reality" without "losing its physiological reality" (19). The broader landscape and mindscape of trauma that qualifies the hysteric's psyche takes on the shape of a patchwork quilt, and here, all types of pain become hysterically *remembered,* reappearing only in a variety of gestural symptoms. As a result, this subject becomes a *hysterical collage* both internally and externally, a ruined work of art that must remain *uncured* in order to maintain its marginal difference. This hysteric must also remain trapped inside of Acker's text, because only there can her symptomatic suffering provide the production of literary fragmentation which characterizes the novel as an avant-garde work:

> She learned she must be several, if not numberless, parts because there was a black hole dividing these parts. No memory. But afterwards remembered pain, so destruction of memory is no cure for the wounds of pain. (*In Memoriam* 260)

This aesthetic reflexivity relies upon the "attentive relationship of a subject to her own body," as well as the author's compulsive fascination with her, permitting these two forms of attentiveness to uncover both the "origin of hysteria" (David-Menard 38), and the desire of the text. But for Freud, this subject's relationship to her body is always characterized negatively because the hysteric is innately deformed by a sublime "anxiety" concerning her sexuality which is developmentally unavoidable. He "had found often enough that in girls anxiety was a consequence of the horror by which a virginal mind is overcome when it is faced for the first time with the world of sexuality" (*Studies* 192), and the sublime consequence of this anxiety is the hysteric's *horror of* and *fascination with* her grotesque body and its sexual desire. However, Freud's theories of sexuality and in particular, "female sexuality," writes Steven Marcus (284), were focused primarily on the dysfunctional nature of the female body in order to substantiate his connections between hysteria and female sexuality as essential forms of *loss* or *lack*. Additionally, this focus carefully concealed his own hysteria, which "he recognized and acknowledged as hysterical," writes William McGrath (173). [3]

---

[3] McGrath suggests that in the summer of 1897, "suffering under increasing pressure from internal and external conflicts, Freud began to refer to what he sometimes called his neurosis and sometimes his hysteria" (185). Freud's father's death occurred during a period of time when there was a significant political and religious triumph of anti-semitic, Catholic clerical forces in Vienna. And "during the period following his father's death in late 1896, when Freud himself began to exhibit hysterical symptoms, the deterioration of sociopolitical conditions in Vienna made the anticlerical dimension of the hysteria diagnosis immediately relevant to his situation (McGrath 153). Freud's symptomatic reaction correlates with a bias among German physicians of that

When Quentin comes "back from Harvard with all these ridiculous theories" in *In Memoriam*, it is "Freud who was to blame" (Acker 153), and by extension, the *scene* of hysterical trauma in Acker's novels is a stereotypically Freudian fairy tale of sexual, medical, or psychological abuse. Typically, when "half the doctor was listening to the patient's replies," his other "half" was "staring at something else," and this allows the usual, misogynistic Freudian diagnosis of a "genetic or genital disturbance" for the woman in question (*In Memoriam* 138). Freud's influence, in Acker's portrayals of the psychological stigmatization of women who are victimized by medical discourse and its methods, is evident in the repetitive staging of sadomasochistic doctor-patient relationships. These are scenes that automatically position the hysteric in a textual and psychological space where she masochistically *chooses* to surrender to the sadistic authority of the doctor.

In a similar way, Kant's theory of the sublime dictates that "the imagination must yield itself to reason," and as the "weak partner" in this hierarchical relationship, the imagination must also sacrifice itself to the "violence" of rationality (Freeman 72). When a confrontation between the imagination and the rational will develops, often the imagination becomes re-represented as "a feminine figure," such as "water or chaos," argues Barbara Claire Freeman (22), and this heterosexist qualification of the struggle

---

period which viewed hysteria as "existing primarily in "degenerate races"" (McGrath 162). Social and cultural classifications of marginality in Freud's time take on an even deeper, postmodern quality of self-hatred in Acker's novels.

between these two forces can also be read in terms of the sadomasochistic forces that position Acker's hysterical narrators on the margins of institutional control and sublime violence. These "feminine figures" are also grounded, foundationally, in the "pain, terror, vigorous exertion and power" of a more "masculine aesthetic mode" (W.J.T. Mitchell qtd in Freeman 72).[4] The subjugation of woman in the violent structure of Kant's sublime is a "precondition" of her rational management, argues Freeman, also

---

[4] In William Burroughs' novelistic experimentation, his main characters act as the key, positivists in the textual or laboratory-like settings of a text, allowing the located isolation of other minor characters to occur in order to legibly record their behaviours within its controlled environment. Both Burroughs' and Acker's authorial indifference to the plight of their characters is indicative, I believe, of an observational and objective model of avant-garde experimentation. The characters, themselves, also *flat-line* their emotional responses to the trauma or pain they experience. In Sade's work, the bedroom is yet another version of the laboratory, and this translation displaces the privacy of the bourgeois individual out into wider arenas of social erasure. Sade's libertines act like scientists whose victims are disposable test-subjects (or,as is the case with other libertines "in training," they adopt the objective disinterest of their teachers). This indifference towards ethical considerations of the Other effects a re-focusing of the scripting of sexual desires into discursively discontinuous narratives. In Burroughs' literary laboratories, those science-fiction theatres of dream and cruelty, and Acker's barren landscapes, dark alleyways, and post-apocalyptic cities, the legacy of Sade is evident. The exertion of power, pain and terror in Sade and Burroughs is definitely a "masculine" mode of aesthetic, sadomasochistic production, and while Acker's "feminine" aesthetics borrows from this standard, it re-produces the male gaze into a critical, female "I" or "eye" without a stable focal point, or a singular possibility of identification.

noting that "Kant's account of the ordeal of the imagination resembles" both Sadean and Freudian "depictions (or constructions) of sexuality," in general (72-3).

Acker's sadistic fathers, boyfriends and brothers are typically the "head-crusher[s]" or "crocodile[s]" of sexual nightmares, cold, rational monsters which rip off penises and function as "scavenger[s'] daughter[s]" which can, like Burke's concept of the natural sublime, manipulate or hold the body of the viewer or victim in the "missionary position," causing he or she to experience a cramping that renders them "insane" (*Empire* 146). These male sadists are *crudely manufactured* monsters, and like female masochists who appear in Acker's work, they too are the unfortunate victims of childhood violence and trauma. Yet unlike these masochistic martyrs, sadists, for Acker, *become* monsters and not artists or saints. And the *controlled* practice of sado-masochism is first evident in the recurring motifs of the Oedipal family drama. Rimbaud's mother, for example, proclaims that she will "bring up my second kid by torturing him" and "that way he won't beget any infected children" (*In Memoriam* 4), and this generational development of abuse reincarnates in her child's "aggression, [which is] internalized as masochism, [and] reappears as sadism" (Benjamin 69). In all of Acker's depictions of sexual relationships she repetitively emphasizes the primary connections between sublimity and sadomasochism because an illumination (and disenchantment) of the individual can occur only through a violent seizure of their sensual or material body. In the following passage, the apathetic enlightenment that the character of R finally experiences results from his recognition of the sublime character

of a frigid "love," a cold and murderous indifference that he feels as a numbness which characterizes the world, his body and the text: "This morning when you struggled with Her, in the snowstorm, green lips, ice, black flag and tears, all the destruction and frigidity of true love: YOUR FORCE" (*In Memoriam* 77).

In Foucault's more general analysis of power, there is only an allusion to the monumental that violence can have upon an individual. In "a relationship of violence [that] acts upon a body or upon things," he writes, such violence can only "force" or "destroy" that body.

> Its opposite pole can only be passivity, and if it comes up against any resistance, it has no other option but to try to minimize it. On the other hand, a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that "the other" (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts: and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up. (Foucault 789) [5]

---

[5] It may be quite problematic to theorize impulses, actions, and consequences into polarities of destruction and passivity. First, it serves to absolutely characterize the passive or aggressive people in the S/M relationship, qualifying them as constructs within a static system. And second, it generalizes the consequential and ethical imperatives necessary for critically addressing power in all its forms. In Acker and Sade's work, power is an elemental yet theoretical "form" which is accepted without reservation. And as a result, sadists and masochists are always represented by both in

But Foucault's normative subjugation is radically reconfigured in work such as Acker's, appearing as a hysterical protest, apart from the theoretical dynamics of what appears as a systematic, sexual exchange, a form of protest which can empowers the immanent and gestural conditions of hysteria, and represents *discontent* rather than *illness*. For Slavoj Žižek, a reformulation of Freudian hysteria occurs when a hysteric recognizes the strategic potential of her defensiveness, understanding that her illness can transform into "a radically ambiguous protest against the Master's interpellation." "Today," Žižek asserts, "borderline disturbances, not hysteria, are the predominant form of 'discontent' in our civilization," yet "borderline' *is* the contemporary form of hysteria" (*The Indivisible* 163-4). Acker's hysterics are vivid examples of postmodern borderline *disturbances*, as well as classical Freudian stereotypes. They are ultramodern,

---

terms of the one-dimensional positions they occupy in relation to specific sites of such power. But the character of literary fantasy is different from actual occurrences of more destructive forms of sexual aggression. On a fictive and metaphoric level, representations such as Acker's and Sade's provide interesting material for sexual fantasy or interpretative analysis, but in reality, the actual force of violent power cannot be valorized as an instinctual or *natural fact*. Acker's literary experiments with sadomasochism illustrate a number of ways that masochists can be hurt, and all masochists in her novels become wounded subjects with fractured psyches. Additionally, her sadists also fall victim to a developmental model. Their self-destructive behaviours and textual violence are short-lived. There would be nothing worse for an egotistical sadist in Acker's novels, than to be considered boring, yet he is woefully predictable and impotent.

subcultural malcontents who aesthetically *disturb* their readers, texts and author by extending their *hysterical discomfort* into expressions of avant-garde *resistance* by way of artistic *dysfunction*.

For Acker, modifications of the body, such as tattooing and bodybuilding, reiterate artistic and/or hysterical strategies of protest in acts of sculptural collage and experimental writing. For example, her "new way of tattooing" in *Empire* is an avant-garde practice as well as a masochistic method of inscription, one where the "raising [up of] defined parts of the flesh" (*In Memoriam* 134) asserts the visible heterogeneity of the hysteric's artful body. When Airplane chooses to use her "rapist for survival" and then "drop him," she is utilizing yet another form of masochistic agency in order to re-create her "locked-up eyes [and] ears," or the earlier construction of her body as "a prison," into "a fortress" (*In Memoriam* 118) of defensive discontent. This transformation follows from both a hysterical and a masochistic reconsideration of subjectivity that Acker describes as: "GOING OVER THE TOP OF THE FLESH" (*In Memoriam* 17).[6]

---

[6] I would qualify Acker's position concerning masochism as first, an "ideological treatise" based on Sade's glorification of both sadism and masochism as fixed roles in reverse-order worlds of rational irrationality. And second, as a potentially emancipatory strategy for the hysteric. Sade's "philosophy" was one that advocated natural brutality and violence, intellectually validating both a natural domination and superiority through the imperatives of a libertine's desire. Sade's *Philosophy In The Bedroom*, where verbose philosophical debates interrupt incredibly violent and pornographic scenes, offers a number of libertines to conduct these rational/irrational disruptions in the text.

Transcending the "top" of the body becomes an aesthetics of *building* the body for Acker, a primary force of technological sublimity that directly influences materialism, in general. As one of her "signature images," bodybuilding, like tattooing, is "symptomatic" of what Acker sees as a "tendency toward the experience of disembodiment in our ordinary lives," argues Joseph Tabbi (22). In *My Mother*, Beatrice's narrative adopts an almost Sadean form of discourse and disruption in a lengthy explication of the capitalist (or capitalized) character of constructive and destructive bodybuilding. Here, the "STORYTELLING METHOD," is also "THE ACT OF BODYBUILDING [which] PRESUPPOSES THE ACT OF MOVING TOWARD THE BODY OR THAT WHICH IS SO MATERIAL THAT IT BECOMES IMMATERIAL" (*My Mother* 110). And the molecular breakdown of this process also addresses the benefits and dangers of deconstruction, so that "A MUSCLE'S BUILT WHEN AND ONLY WHEN ITS EXISTING FORM IS SLOWLY AND RADICALLY DESTROYED. IT CAN BE BROKEN DOWN BY SLOWLY FORCING IT TO ACCOMPLISH MORE THAN IT'S ABLE," argues Acker (112). And finally, the third discourse on method that Beatrice offers produces a

---

Eugenie, Madame de Saint-Ange, Dolmance, and Le Chevalier are character types identical to Acker's "constructs," and as both members of philosophical dialogue and functional, sexual *members* of pornographic performances, they are both sadistically transgressive and murderous. However, Acker does not maintain the rigidity of Sade's literary formula or the distinctly male preoccupation he holds for sadomasochistic fantasy, and as a result, her philosophical musings are brief, dislocated and distracted in nature, and female masochists are rarely murdered in her pornographically-charged scenarios, as is usual in Sade's work.

"LITERATURE OF THE BODY" (*My Mother* 114). By "moving toward the body," in a material and transcendent way, a subject's struggle to reclaim her immanence is affected by a sublime recognition of the immensity and unpredictability of not only her own body but all existence, in general. A variety of shocking deformations of the postmodern and neo-primitivistic body in Acker's texts provide a plethora of grotesque details which substantiate the decorative nature of Kant's "false purposelessness," as well as a generative taxonomy of technological horrors. For Acker and Beatrice, bodybuilding must *break down* the body's defenses in order to build newer and stronger structures. Therefore, a "muscle group only grows when it's been radically broken down," writes Acker, but "broken only to a certain point" (*In Memoriam* 226). Here, like hysterical and masochistic resistance, the survival of the body is paramount, and as "the body language of powerlessness" (Showalter 103), hysteria provides Acker with a radically different vehicle for a new kind of building of the body, I would argue. In other words, her intensely fragmentary emphasis on the heterogeneity of hysterical silence and masochistic suffering allows the women in her texts to refashion their bodies into immanent fortresses, providing other examples of the benefits of hysterical suffering and composition.

But on a very basic level, David Brande argues that "assumptions about the meaning and value of pain in the context of masochistic sexuality" in Acker's work should be suspended because they "problematize the assumption that masochism

necessarily occurs in a context of dominance and victimization" (191).[7] Yet masochistic suffering is also routinely depicted by Acker as a passive reactiveness where the masochist/hysteric "needs" what the sadist will do to her "because it's only pain and being controlled" that can "cut through" her "autism" (*In Memoriam 15*). "Pain exists," for Acker and her hysterics (*In Memoriam* 9), and the re-awakening of the masochist's desire in the S/M scene produces another kind of hysterical body. In *Empire,* Abhor's Daddy forces her "to live among [her] nerves sharper than razor

---

[7]Many theories possess a basic recognition of the intense, experiential suffering of real, rather than fictional, individuals. For example, in *The Body In Pain,* Elaine Scarry theoretically interprets confessional accounts by both victims and torturers in order to examine the deterritorialization of language and meaning in scenarios where pain is the central issue. It is generally assumed that the sexual nature of sadomasochism (like Acker's use of masochistic pain and pleasure), is somehow *more* radical because it occurs outside of normative definitions of the negative forces of pain and suffering. Here, attention to the pleasurable aspects of pain, in contrast to its negative aspects, for example, leads theorists such as Brande to *generally* examine the dynamics of sexual power rather than the character of painful interaction, even in a sexual manner. Much of what Acker promotes in her writing concerning S/M is a traditional re-reading of its binary forces, yet in her portrayal of hysterical masochists, she *defies* the categorical containment of this position within its fixed polarity by asserting the hysteric's capacity for resistance. However, these *objects* of Sade's sadistic pleasure become, in Acker's hands, *objects* that can testify to their suffering while attesting to the brutal erasure and/or painful denigration of their identities. Acker does not tell stories *about* her masochists as sexual things or objects that are merely depicted, then destroyed, but instead, allows them to narrate their own suffering.

blades, to have no certainties" and "to live in pain, [and] to know there's nothing else" (10), yet she transcends the banality of her material suffering and is transformed into a female nomad. The classic Oedipal disaster that always occurs in Acker's novels is a product of cultural and societal constructions of female masochists such as Abhor who are cruelly conditioned by their father or mother's sadistic passions. Abhor's Daddy teaches her "how to insert a razor blade" into her wrist "just for fun" (*Empire* 9), but this kind of pain, whether other-or-self-inflicted, is a necessary vehicle for her masochistic enlightenment. "Maybe it's necessary to feel pain," she says, because "if you feel pain you're not dying" (*Empire* 69).

If the meaning of pain is consistently reconceptualized because this depiction of masochistic sexuality offers accounts of both a passive yet assertive agency and energy, then hysteria and its symptomatic connections to masochism must also be affected. For Acker, the suffering of the hysteric and/or masochist is reflected in the text first, by the external application of pain to her body's surface. And pain such as this, on the level of textual and conceptual representation, is "the only remaining vehicle for communication" (Brande 199) for either Acker or her hysterics. Initially, in response to this first breach of textual signification, the anesthetic defense that the hysteric mounts against the application of this pain is less a strategy of masochistic resistance, and more a portrayal of a "body without feeling" (Romanyshyn 164). Here, the masochistic hysteric in Acker's text is what Robert Romanyshyn describes as a classical kind of zombie, where "her tremors, paralysis, [and] astasia-abasia," exemplify the

"symptomatic side" of the hysteric's body as "more like the motion of a machine." The "body without feeling," or "machine" of hysterical communication that Acker portrays is characterized by its apathetic and auto-affective compulsiveness, as well as its drive for subjective survival. Only the "sympathetic application of pain," argues Brande (202), to the hysteric's body can re-activate the masochistic assertiveness that is necessary for her survival within the text. And as a result, Acker's hysterics appear to embrace, yet deny, the following maxim: "My body is open to all people" (*Empire* 69). In total, the abnormal specialization of the hysteric's symptomatic body exhibits the sublime tension between pleasure and pain, or construction and destruction, and in the "desire to inflict or receive pain," as Jessica Benjamin argues, the breaking of "boundaries is also an effort to find them" (64). Hysterical masochists and sadists in Acker persistently seek to transgress the psychological and physical boundaries that separate their bodies from those of others, reiterating the aggressive needs of her invasive texts and viral forms of language.

If sadomasochistic relationships always "tend toward death, or at any rate, toward deadness, numbness, the exhaustion of sensation," as Jessica Benjamin suggests (65), then a positive reading of sadomasochism may not be possible. While sadomasochism is a form of power that typically negates a character's individuality or identity in Acker's novels, it also serves as a primary motivator for her hysterical sustenance and defense. Appearing as both a traumatic and recuperative *moment* in Acker's work, sadomasochism functions to provoke a hysterical creativity and perverse

utilization of resistance.[8] The *nonsensical meaning* generated by Acker's discourse

---

[8]Masochistic and sadistic power dynamics in Sade's *Justine* promote sado-masochism as a natural state of affairs, one where individuals are born into "a state of perpetual warfare" and this Nature is a state that is then reflected in the world of "men" (Sade 494). The "strength" of the sadist is an instinctual form of control over the existence of the masochist (487) without any conscientious barriers, and the "crime of destroying one's fellow, be persuaded, dear girl...is purely hallucinatory," he writes (518). For Sade, there is no "criminal" or taboo desire because all desire originates from a natural instincts and its impulses, and therefore, this brutal vision of existence normalizes sexual desires that are considered perverse. The virtuous person or what Sade qualifies as the eternal masochist, may refuse to accept the control of the sadist or libertine yet she does so in terms of an established "order" where she is typically disempowered. Acker often appears to agree with this Sadean order, but unlike Sade, she doesn't use "natural" premises to argue for either the inherent brutality of the world, or the clearly delineated roles in all human models of intercourse. The violence and excess of her world is as chaotic and strange as Sade's, yet she critically engages with the political, social, and technological diseases of twentieth-century America's repression of human desire and free will. In this regard, Acker's *Portrait Of An Eye* is a direct response to Bataille's *Story Of An Eye*, plays upon Sadean power relationships as well as Nietzschean forms of violence in terms of a base of orgiastic delirium and meaninglessness In *The Impossible*, Bataille's vignettes of perverse sex are presented alongside of evidentially Sadean commentary. Yet, Bataille's theological concerns are similar to those that Acker affirms in books such as *Portrait, My Mother and Empire*. Finally, homosexual, as yet another manifestation of S/M sexuality in Acker's work, develops from a specific kind of masochism that Jean Genet depicts in *Journal Of A Thief* and *Our Lady Of The Flowers*. The suffering of the petty thief or criminal always allows s/he to metamorphose into the artist. Genet's artistic masochism is most literally

successfully composes a newer and more sublime kind of hysterical refusal and production. Her slow decomposition of linguistic comprehension is routinely advanced as a portrait of postmodern decay, and this apocalyptic destruction of language and meaning becomes consequentially erected upon a series of textual foundations of hysterical resistance. The sublime provides the inner illumination of the hysteric, and through her suffering, an active masochism attempts to rebuild the world of the text as a new "Empire" of non-meaning/meaning:

> Ten years ago it seemed possible to destroy language through language: to destroy language which normalizes and controls by cutting that language. Nonsense would attack the empire-making (empirical) empire of language, the prisons of meaning" (*Empire* 134).

All abjected subjects who inhabit this Empire are the most perfect masochists for any or Acker's literary aims; they are "speaking subject[s]" (Smith 119) or "mediation[s]" between their "own unconscious desires and histories" who readily submit "to the ideological" (120). As both "repressed and innovative" subjects, they are easily "distilled in[to] literature," especially in its avant-garde forms (Smith 127). And finally, as presences which disturb "identities, systems, and orders," these masochistic hysterics are symbolic of the "something that does not respect limits, positions, [or] rules," and the "in-between, the ambiguous, [and] the mixed," as Paul Smith concludes. For Julia

---

referenced in Acker's *Pussy*, where many of the girl pirates and other female outlaws are transformed into cyborgian authors.

Kristeva, masochistic denial absolutely characterizes the suffering of the abjected subject , both as a fictive and fatal qualification of the influence of the sublime:

> When I am beset by abjection, the twisted braid of affects and thoughts I call by such a name does not have, properly speaking, a definable *object*. The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an ob-jest, an otherness ceaselessly feeling in a systematic quest of desire. It is not the white expanse or slack boredom of repression, not the translations and transformations of desire that wrench bodies, nights, and discourse; rather, it is a brutish suffering the "I" puts up with, sublime and devastated. (*Powers* 1)

In Kristeva's analysis, the subject *abjects herself* at the same moment that she claims to establish *herself*, and as a result, in this moment of Sadean masochism and sacrifice, she becomes "an other at the expense" of her own death (Kristeva 3).

However, for Acker, this abjection is not solely self-reflexive or sacrificial. The external, textual world of *Empire* is a "hazy" or obscure realm of abjection, a landscape that resembles "human nausea" (8) because it develops out of Abhor's general feeling of "confusion," or memories of "only nausea," where she "remember[s] ad nauseam" (*Empire* 48). This form of abject nausea moves from inside the subject out into the world, and it is identical to the feeling that "something" inside of (yet outside) Airplane "was revolting" (*In Memoriam* 107). Abjection works as both the interior and exterior manifestation of nausea in order to create both a *personal* and a *public* recognition of

disgust.[9] To the extent that an internal abjection becomes reiterated in an external manner, the interiority of an abjected woman becomes a mirror of her exterior form, and when "the body of the world is dislocated" (*In Memoriam* 112), her organic body adopts a sublime resemblance to this dysfunctional universe. The physical or textual *evidence* of more universal forms of abjection in Acker's work can be seen in the *narrative dissatisfaction* of hysterical bodies and their abnormal symptomologies. Fictional correspondences that Acker arranges between hysteria and abjection eventually constitutes and contaminates the character of her settings and themes. Additionally, Acker's personal decision to withdraw from traditional formalities of canon and genre can be read as yet another form of hysterical composition or abject experimentation:

> I didn't really understand why I refused to use linear narrative; why my sexual genders kept changing; why basically I am the most disoriented novelist that ever existed...I was like a death-dumb-and-blind-person for years, I just did

---

9 Kristeva's *deject* is perhaps a more compatible concept in regards to Acker's characters. It is an abjected subject who experiences an internal state of abjection from herself, as well as an external abjection from others. These abjected individuals are plagued by a hysterical dis-ease, consistently attempting to expel themselves from the foundation of themselves, yet recompose themselves in that same process. This circular movement creates a "revolting" material subject who is abject in her appearance and behaviour, and much like the hysteric, she too possesses an excessive, heterogeneous body and mind. This grotesque or liminal specimen is a monstrously "dejected" Other in Acker's work.

> what I did but had no way of telling anyone about it, or talking about it.
>
> (Acker, *Hannibal* 10)

The consequences for dejects that suffer this kind of metaphysical and existential pain are unavoidable because they ultimately, and consistently, produce hysterical systems of symptomatic refusal within the homogeneity of the texts (or societies) that contain them. This system in Acker's novels operates in a progressive fashion. In *Portrait*, for example, hysterical conversion allows a deject (Airplane) to "blow" her "identity outward, [and] away" in a violent expulsion of identity that is one of the primary symptoms of hysterical personality disorder (*Portrait* 33). And in the second phase of this process, the newly abjected subject then encounters "a black ocean under a black sky" and immediately recognizes the external sublimity of nature as being identically matched to her surreal interiors. The black sea and sky of this abjection are also another manifestation of a melancholic hysteria, and the darkness that characterizes Nature in this passage, also refers to the black core of a hysteric's need to "withdraw into a tiny," black ball (*Portrait* 31). Here, Nature and the Real fall into the black hole of hysterical suffering, and the transformation of this "black mark" of melancholy into "a passional torrent" or a "hysterical effect" only occurs once the "sensuality of suffering's pleasure" becomes "a thirst after inextinguishable life" (Kristeva,"On Melancholic" 18). Only literature possesses the potential for individual immortality, and while Acker fills her texts with what Kristeva may categorize as the "sensual" pursuits of pleasure, which are "theft," "banditry" or "suicide," the transcendent ideals necessary for an aesthetic

resurrection of self and world also appear (Kristeva 18). The melancholic darkness that surrounds Acker's hysterics is therefore, graphically and metaphorically represented as a sublime form of suffering, one that functionally interrelates pain with horror, and displeasure with enlightenment.

Hysterical *disguise*, as it relates to the pleasure of crime or transgression, can defer any ideas of authorial control, and the way that texts can be scripted is therefore, the same way that bodies can be inscribed. Here, the "richness of the body" is identical to a potent materiality of the text, and Acker's loss of control appears in the playful, disconnected and indifferent, authorial symptoms of hysterical conversion (*Hannibal* 22), which are substantiated by an aesthetic environment of transgressive energy.

Hysterical bodies and their texts are always known by the symptoms they exhibit, and this intimate relationship offers a number of compositional and interpretative possibilities. For example, the hysteric's *cough* can be read as an intermittent break in the text, a gap in logic that symptomatically enhances the disjointed nature of Acker's assertion of postmodern fragmentation. Additionally, both *Pussy* and *My Mother* are hysterically attractive texts because of their gestural seizures or those staggered breaks in form that produce a legible testimony to all hysterical transmissions, in general. Strange *paralyses or twitches* produce lapses in dialogue and setting that spasmodically respond to the empty space of Acker's hysterically white silence and pain. Alternately, blacked-out sentences in both texts appear to be

amputated from the body of the grotesque mother's textual body, and the incomprehensible desire for dislocation and censorship that regulates both narratives as a nihilistic yet generative aesthetic affirmation. And finally, the *repetitious gestures* of the hysteric compulsively attempt to disguise yet reveal the meaninglessness of existence by way of a rhetorical insufficiency which afflicts all literary pursuits. However, the masochistic endurance which Acker gives to her hysterics also permeates her narrative structures, and the continuation of the story is never contested. In truth, Acker's texts function identically to the fortressed hysteric who protests and re-creates her desire by way of a gestural and material inconsistency.

The Black Virgin Mary

In *Empire*, Abhor describes her body as a sublime monument that is entirely composed of the baser fluids of the organic body. By envisioning herself as a Magdalene who possesses both the stigmata and hysterical demeanour necessary for the proper production of a saintly despair, Abhor is emblematic of an iconographic performativity that is typical in Acker's novels. Her young hysterics willingly adopt a saintly role-playing, while excluding the classically virginal aspects of such stereotypes. "My tears were the tears of whores," says Abhor, and simultaneously, she wishes she could "have Mary Magdalene tear Virgin Mary's flesh into shreds" before her eyes in order to allow her to witness the red "cunt juice and piss" that will drop "out of [the virgin's] eyes" (*Empire* 65). Young hysterics in Acker's novels also adopt a superficial demeanour which imitates that of other famous women saints. However, their

adoration of the negative aspects of martyrdom, as is the case for Abhor, demands only a masochistic suffering without the relief of either religious conviction or ecstatic illumination. The "patron saint of hysteria, St. Theresa, was a woman of genius and with great practical capacity," writes Breuer (*Studies* 312), and not a hysterical girl who possesses masochistic fanaticism and fantasies. Freud's fascination with the Virgin Mary, in contrast to Breuer's, was psychologically substantiated by Dora's dream of the Sistine Madonna, providing him with a notion of the youthful adoration and sexual obsession which is far more complimentary to Acker's darker saints. The Madonna, he found, was "a favourite counter-idea in the minds of girls who feel themselves oppressed by imputations of sexual guilt," a fact "which was the case [with] Dora" (Freud, *The Case 129)*. In *Portrait*, Charlotte Wood's hallucination once again reverses the standard virginal qualities of The Madonna or Mary in order to more aptly reflect her youthful and hysterical perversions. "I hallucinate that the Virgin Mary wears black pants and a black leather jacket, [that] she climbs trees, [and] she doesn't give a fuck for anyone," she says (*Portrait* 4). Charlotte's profane adaptation of the Virgin Mary into a Black Madonna originates in a moment of hysterical hallucination, rather than masochistic ecstasy. In this, she appears to comply with Freud's analysis of hysterical conversion, one which posits a medieval origin for hysteria. This hypothesis led him to conclude that the frequent occurrences of hysteria in medieval nuns and female saints could provide a wealth of material for his aetiology of hysteria (McGrath 165). And as the primary detail in Freud's aetiology, occurrences of saintly stigmata, the most religiously

documented and authentic *symptoms* of modern hysteria, became emblematic of the translation of hysterical passion onto the body. In fact, as Breuer asks, "What could be more genuinely hysterical than stigmata?" (*Studies* 326). The exclusively *female* terrain of martyrdom or sainthood that qualified Freud's psychoanalytical correspondences and propositions, offered evidence of a feminine *asceticism* as a condition created by hysterical predispositions in all women. Acker's assertive forms of hysteria also emphasize the grotesque power and presence of hysterics who become saints, and these are the martyrs/whores who deconstruct the passive virginity of the Magdalene by re-composing their uncanny and monumental bodies of perverse desire. The prostitutes who possess the names of archaic saints in *Pussy*, for example, are asserting their visceral and gestural *weight* within a soundscape of sounds or "cries," instead of words:

> Ange, St. Barbara, Louise Vanaen de Voringhem, and the rest of the whores learned that is language or words whose meanings seem definite are dissolved into a substance of multiple gestures and cries, a substance which has a more direct, a more visceral capacity for expression, than all the weight that the current social, political, and religious hegemonic forms of expression carry will be questioned. Become questionable. Finally, lost. (*Pussy* 31)

In this passage Acker equates the *substance* of the hysteric's gestural constitution and her refusal *as being greater than* the *weight* of society itself, comparatively emphasizing the power of the monumental body of the hysteric/saint over the expansive structure of

the social. In the prostitutes' alternative modes of correspondence there is "an alternative physical, verbal, and gestural language" of hysteria being performed, "an iconic social communication" rather than a "disease" (Showalter 7). And because its "protolanguage" of a hysteric's symptoms becomes "a code used by a patient to communicate a message which, for various reasons, cannot be verbalized," it is, therefore, "a mimetic disorder" which "mimics culturally permissible expressions of distress" (Showalter 15). Acker's hysterics may attempt to articulate their "expressions of distress" but their disorderly communication is woefully inadequate. In this regard, they are reminiscent of Anna O, whose hysterical symptoms or "contractures" began to appear with "a deep-going functional disorganization of her speech," a breakdown which later developed into her hysterical withdrawal. Once Anna "lost her command of grammar and syntax," she was "almost completely deprived of words" (Breuer, *Studies* 77).

At this point I would argue that Acker's *hysterical writing* and/or *writing of hysteria* is not concerned with developing yet another aetiology of the disorder, but rather, she is committed to advancing hysterical defense as a potential, aesthetic *expression* of that which is linguistically *inexpressible*. Further, in the "oblique, faltering" gesture and writing of hysterical "figures and intensities," the more substantial characteristics of Acker's aesthetic are advanced. According to Evelyne Ender, the way that writing such as this "gives way" or *falls away* from the "frames of representation," is also suggestive of the sublime. Therefore, hysterical writing, in contrast to the writing of

hysteria, is a writing that, "in its textualized form," plays, "moreover, with another kind of duplicity," argues Ender (17), and if hysteria "is nothing but a sign, [or] an invitation to read," it is one that cannot "reveal a code that would enable us to lift the secret" because "it just spins its own stories" (268). For the character of Capitol, this story is a difficult one to tell because of its traumatic complexity and her confusion regarding her own identity:"What's my story," she asks, "not the stories they've been and keep handing me," but "my story." She finally concludes that it is a "story [that] has something to do with opened-out flesh" (*In Memoriam* 154), bringing back an emphasis on the hysterical body. Mary Jacobus suggests that "the study of hysteria provides the basis for psychoanalytic theory because hysterical processes lend themselves to the analytic reading process" (200), and interpretations such as these create sublime "invitations" for the reader to decipher the "opened-out" bodies of hysterics like Capitol, I would argue. In order to effectively *read* the open body or book of the hysteric, a *radically different* process of reading would be required, or, as is the case with Acker's novels, a *sign-reading*. An interpretation of signs is necessary in terms of both Acker's hysteric, who lacks "an image of the body" (Kahane 148), as well as her narrative, which defensively maintains its distortions and excesses.[10]

---

[10] The "difference" of the hysteric can be clearly seen in the abnormal gestural operation of her body and this apparent heterogeneity is always a recognition of the grotesque. The immanent grotesque is always a liminal figure or an excessive Other. As a figure that is both fascinating and repulsive, the grotesque is a sublime artifact and a spectacular experience.

Acker's "production of subjectivities within [a] scriptural economy" arises out of what she finds is a fear of the "opaque and dispersed flesh," a material form which has survived the "inscription of the code or the law onto [its] flesh," as well as "the transformation of that flesh into a recognizable body" (Brande 196). This same body, for Deleuze and Guattari, symbolically represents all the "suicidal and demented" bodies and minds trapped within "late Capitalism" (*A Thousand* 197). This inscription and/or construction in Acker's work privileges "masochism as a mode of experimentation" and necessity that brings "forth a plane of consistency of desire," argues David Brande (194).[11]

Acker avoids offering any clear descriptions of her main characters' bodies in order to advance an ambiguous form of conceptual resistance which seeks to provoke her reader's recognition of the undefinable nature of the grotesque and the sublime. Meanwhile, she over-emphasizes the grosser aspects of their physiological immanence by reinforcing them as abject objects of grotesque constitution, and they are, first and

---

[11] Connections between Deleuze and Guattari's "Body Without Organs" and Robert Romanyshyn's mesmerized or mechanical "corpse-body" of the hysteric, suggest to me that the embalmed body of the hysteric is an identical concept to the "Body Without Organs." In Deleuze and Guattari's reformulation of the body deformed by capital, the cult of individuality is decomposed and potential sites for new organic and/or immanent experiences appear. At this time, the hysteric's gestural communication negates rational or empirical truth, and as a result, the hysteric is representative of a *total material effect* of symptomatic and uncanny production in the Real.

foremost, *only* hairy, dirty and smelly women-or-animals.

Acker's utilization of the masochistic energy of representation under the influence of the hysterical sublime allows her main characters to "choose something (symptom formation) instead of nothing (radical psychotic autism, psychic suicide, the destruction of the symbolic universe)" (Bronfen 74), also providing a variety of hysterical bodies that reflect the negative landscapes of perversity, deformity and excess that arise out of the grotesque's affiliation with the technological sublime. In this case, Acker's work reinforces only the liminal qualities of hysterical bodies within linguistic systems; primarily, their fragmentary and obscure natures. Her hysterical masochists consistently *choose* to re-enact their symptoms, rather than face a death-sentence of autism, suicide, or blind apathy. Therefore, the "symptom is thus a "question of being" for these women, and "not an utterance produced by the conscious ego" (Shepherdson 446) which can be repressed or modified. This "piece of unconscious discourse" becomes "inscribed upon the flesh" (Shepherdson) of the catatonic bodies that Acker produces, bodies, which, in turn, compose other *bodies of work* that depict Acker's *working out* of the literary and aesthetic body, in general. In her hysteric's artistic reclamation of trauma through aesthetic composition, Acker effectively allows her character's symptom to *become* her body, and the polyphony of gestural differences which characterize masochistic hysteria as an aesthetic site, as well as and a feminist strategy of re-inscription, *re-produce* all sorts of bodies of hieroglyphic encryption as "dangerous" things (Ragland-Sullivan 209). When a hysteric's "symptom hides the

dangerous thing even as it points to it" (Bronfen 73), the veiling of her trauma, or that event that precedes her symptom, also perpetuates a veiling of her hysterical desire in either her existence, or the world of the text. As a result, only the most extreme characteristics of hysterical desire begin to appear in serial instances of literary and symbolic excess. In Acker's negotiations of hysteria and sadistic terror in *My Mother*, this desire overinflates specific acts of sadistic violence, as well as the tools which perpetuate the masochist's suffering:

> "All life is suffering," their intonations at this edge of reality, as they rubbed, beat at, slashed me by paddles, knots, whips, lashes, belts, underpants, hairs, used holey condoms, holy crosses and other toiletries; I was confused, and so, aware only of cries, out-bursts, moans, whimpers, word bits. The language of the flesh. Sometimes I recognized some flesh as my own flesh. (Acker 152)

"Symptom-formation" is often the impetus towards a gestural excess, and as a "repression that fails," it creates "a symptom [that] articulates something that is so dangerous to the health of the psyche that it must be repressed" (Bronfen 73). Therefore, the psychoanalytical evaluations of hysteria reproduced by Acker's manifold expressions of external sensations and experiences of anxiety, fear and abuse are equally matched with more internal forms of self-alienation.

But in reference to sublimity, on the other hand, it often is the traumatic event that creates the "symptom," and this is evident in Kant's description of the "sacrifice" of the female imagination to the rational violence of intellectual control (Bronfen 103).

Additionally, the symptom, like the sublime object, is also a "fascinatingly dangerous thing" (Bronfen 73) because it too, attempts to represent the unrepresentable. And the sublime, "as a mode of representation that adduces something that lies outside the limit of representation" (Dellamora 15), correlates with gestural imperatives on the part of a hysterical symptom, and here, both the symptom, and the sublime, open up the possibility for alternative modes of communication to develop in the individual. The nature of the sublime, writes Jean-François Lyotard, is "violent, [and] divided against itself, it is simultaneously fascination, horror, and elevation," and like the hysterical body, the subject within the sublime partakes of its nature when he or she symptomatically gestures outwards from what becomes a deeper, sublime "feeling" (*Lessons* 231). As Acker remarks concerning the production of spectacles and symptoms in both the sublime and the hysterical, these compositions are always part of an "art " that is "the elaboratings of violence" (*Great* 123).

The "sense of pain" a subject may feel in an experience of the sublime occurs as a result of her imagination's inadequacy to cope with the "formless phenomenon" before it (Lyotard, *Lessons* 239). Therefore, the sublime "feeling" is "the destruction of the one by the other in the violence of their differend" (Lyotard). But if threats to a subject's rationality remain unresolved in her comprehension of the sublime, these will become reiterated in the psychological after-effects of her sublime crisis, much in the same way that a hysteric's originary trauma haunts her. Such incommensurability appears within the subject's field of ego-id-superego, effectively both the individual's

superseding literal description and communication of its form. Sublime challenges to individual certainty in Acker's work are absolutely connected to concepts of "bigness" or monumentalism. This is a "bigness" which usually presents itself forcefully, and in Airplane's case, causes the mind of the viewer to "swerve" (Acker, *In Memoriam* 112), only permitting a simplistic identification of this "bigness" with the terror of the expansive threat of the sublime. As a result, Airplane's ability to articulate this formal presence is as vague or general as the sublime's actual presentation. "I know bigness," she says. "So big you can see its material. It's so big that when the feeling happens down there, you can't tell what's going on in there, what's going on in there and everything becomes lost" (112). The sublime in Acker's work acts to routinely modify a hysterical subject by magnifying her philosophical and psychological bifurcation, eventually creating her as both a hysterical subject divided within herself, and a radically conflicted intellectual who is set apart from the linguistic order.

The distinction between the *sublime subject* of philosophy, and a psychological *subject within the sublime,* for Peter de Bolla, is purely theoretical because "the sign of the subject" of the sublime "takes on the contours of a theory which cannot represent to itself its own practice," causing it to become "self-divided across the bar of theory and practice [and] self and self-image" (295). This conflation, when it occurs, creates both a "subject for the sublime and a subject in the sublime" (de Bolla), effectively modifying the phenomenon itself.

The crisis of the philosophical sublime occurs because a "contest" or "struggle

between two bodies" causes each to exceed itself, "being more than body," and yet, "in that excess threatening the other (body, that is more than body)" (Bernstein 173). Airplane's encounter with the anonymous gaze of a voyeuristic eye (or I) which is attached to a formless or hidden body, reiterates the way that the psychologically expansive sublime can bring about a crisis in a subject's facility of representation. "Through a crack in the door," the "eye," of the natural sublime, in a post-apocalyptic setting, causes Airplane to realize she can either put her "clothes back on, acknowledging both the eye and [her] fear," or "ignore both," a dilemma she resolves by deciding "it was safer and more dangerous to ignore both," and "that kind of danger made me feel good" she says (*In Memoriam* 106). In clinical manifestations or philosophical evaluations of sublime psychosis, this renegotiation or avoidance originates from a traumatic repression, on the part of the subject, which responds to the "negative aesthetics" (Lyotard 53) that qualify her experience. This aesthetic order ensures that the "proper proportion in the free play of the two faculties that are being exercised" (Lyotard) will never occur. And at this point in time, the forces of attraction and repulsion which are now present in the sublime subject create a "safer and more dangerous" oscillation that enlists both the awe and terror of the psychological sublime. And then, the characteristics of the imagination begin to take on a familiar series of hysterical and masochistic tendencies, where it "is not tormented wholly against its wishes" but is a "willing victim" that assents to, and even participates in, "in its own violation" (Freeman 75). In this manner, the shadowy figure of the hysteric can be seen

in the sublime transformation of its subject into an "agent of its [own] self-mutilation" (Freeman). Here, the subject of the sublime "gives up its unbounded activity of perception and deprives itself of freedom by its own act" (Freeman 75), and in much the same way, Acker's masochistic hysterics repress *and* reorganize their trauma into a number of self-destructive *and* artistic acts. When the *all-seeing eye* and *unseen body* of the conceptual sublime's ocular panopticon appropriates Airplane's body within its perverse gaze, it provokes a psychological crisis both within her, and inside Acker's text. Both character and text become afflicted with a "hysterical blindness," one which corresponds with Airplane's and Acker's avoidance or repression, both psychologically and aesthetically, as "a wish to look at something forbidden and the punishment for such transgression" (Showalter 44). The strictly physiological symptoms of hysterical conversion operate in a similar way, and once the imagination is forcefully pushed towards "the limits of *what* it can present," it also "does violence to itself in order to present *that* [which] it can no longer present" (Lyotard, *Lessons* 56). The wounds left by this self-repression become apparent in the choppy breaks or gaps in experimental texts when the writing, the author and the reader are simultaneously brought "close to insanity" by the influence of the sublime, and the imagination forbids "itself the absolute [as] much as it still wants" it, consequentially producing conflicted works of art and psyches that possess "thought [as] a kind of spasm" (Lyotard). For Acker, the written reiteration of this sublime spasm continually moves back and forth, from the behaviours and desires her main characters, into the predispositions of her legible discourse. In

Pussy, as Ange's sensory and conceptual capabilities begin to break down, the "spasms" of her unresolved crisis become most evident on the textual level, and the *breaking apart* of the comprehensible limits between world-and-subject are also found in the decomposition of textual form and its comprehensible meaning. For the character of Airplane, terror and fascination exist in equal proportion in terms of her experience of the sublime. "Everything" that she sees in the world is "mad and shining wet," and out of this surreal context, "angels [to] rise out of the bottom of the sky of night" in a final, and monumental, sublime deconstruction of reality (*In Memoriam* 99).

Acker's evident alliance with interpretations of the "feminine sublime" can be seen in passages such as these and her form of representational fluidity acts as a "site of passage and border-crossing in which meanings collide and transform one another" (Freeman 10). This stylistic digression occurs within "an ongoing process of re-metaphorization" where " the movement of boundary itself" is evident, argues Freeman (10). In what appears as a distinctly hysterical refusal to restitute a sublime dilemma, Acker's literary engagement with both sublime theory and phenomena habitually reclaims the *spasmed* imagination of characters, readers and author. Her disseminatory vision of truth, reality and art that testifies to the inherently sublime reconstitution of the subject *in the world*, as well as the *world in the subject*. And therefore, Acker's presentation of the effeminate energies of hysterical masochists are central for the metaphoric and stylistic experiments she makes with literary form and content. In a description of the anesthetic discontinuation of Pussy's physical and psychological

normality, Acker suggests that a period of stasis necessarily precedes Pussy's metamorphosis, and once the sublime material *inside* of her *comes out*, the production of art alongside the maintenance of one's own hysteria offers a number of synaesthetic possibilities:

> All my sensations are a sky. I could no longer talk. As soon as I stopped talking, everything turned white and the waves that were approaching , slowly, steadily, and very strongly, solid, transformed into my blood, then into my bones. Whatever had been the rhythms of my body inside my body were now rhythms outside. (*Pussy* 34)

In this passage, the body of the hysteric is transformed into a sublime body through a process of re-productive delirium, and the hysterical "sky" which reflects Pussy's new "form" is also a new Nature, one which appears as her grotesque infant who is composed of supernatural light and rhythm. This exclusively female "encounter with sheer magnitude" shatters the "ordinary perceptions of space and time," and therefore, it is a "traumatic event," where the pseudo-maternal subject is confined by the sublime, and like the hysteric who is "possessed by a past so catastrophic" that she cannot "articulate its effects nor forget its scars" (Freeman 126), Pussy is physically and psychologically metamorphosed. Within the "representation[s] of trauma" or hysterical pain that Acker portrays, the reader can only attempt to "read the wound" of the sublime text and its hysterical body in order to understand the complexity of the hysterical sublime.

The symptoms of hysteria and the effects of the sublime offer up *signs* that can gesturally represent subjective and aesthetic, trauma or shock. And in the way that symptoms appear as material indicators within a linguistic or visual system of meaning, the signs of the sublime also mark out the deformation of an artistic work or body.

In both cases, the clinical classification of symptoms becomes indicative of broader psychological or textual areas of a more general disorder. Typically, in the clinical evaluation of hysteria, "a choking sensation, as if a ball were in the throat, called the *globus hystericus,*" is the most familiar sign of the disorder, a symptom which produces the "coughs and loss of voice," as well as the "pains in various parts of the body." The "tics and twitches, paralyses, deafness, blindness [and] fits of crying, fainting, convulsive seizures, and sexual longings" (Showalter 15) which are usually found to belong to the hysteric, are also characteristic of subjects who have been traumatized by the sublime. Once the degeneration of a hysteric's sanity is represented by her discursive decomposition, the philosophical crisis of post-apocalyptic existence that Acker so astutely offers in her work, is also distilled into literature. In *Pussy,* Pussy becomes yet another material reflection of the progressive decay and repressive inertia that qualifies a more universal influence of the sublime upon the postmodern subject (Acker 134). For O St. Barbara, this symbiotic relationship is olfactorily emphasized by the increasingly unpleasant "smell" of her liminal body. The grotesque intensification of heterogeneous decay in this case, produces other forms of immanent communication, and her smelly body becomes a saintly and symptomatic Other who

has been "touched" by the divine power of the sublime. The decomposition of O's mother provides yet another example of the multiplicity of material symptoms that can develop in the physical relationship between the sublime and hysteria. As both a dead (or autistic) individual, as well as a dysfunctional subject, O's mother walks "around her house naked, touching her own body [and wearing] her menstrual blood on her mouth" (*Pussy* 15). Finally, for Antigone, who describes herself as both a grotesque and sublime object, she is both a transparent form who is "no longer human, but outside [of] every social stricture [or] structure," as well as a "hysterical, maddened perverse foreign wasteful virginal nymphomaniac secret" who "smelled lousy" (*Pussy 184*). Generally, the *smells and symptoms* of Acker's hysterical women illustrate the hysterical sublimity that works, in conjunction, inside of these characters' bodies and outside, in their texts. These olfactorial and metaphorical presences are symbols of the excessive nature of Acker's writing, and when "these pages [begin to] smell of women" (*Pussy* 30), the sublime translation of literary hysteria into the monumental excess of corpus or art, and the book, world and work are indeed, a "stupid, ugly horrible a mess pinhead abominable vomit eyes-pop-out-always-presenting-disgusting-always presenting-what-people-flee" (*Great* 15).

"The sublime may exceed "the very possibility of symbolization" (Tabbi 13), yet the symptoms that Acker's hysterics exhibit, like the incomprehensibility of the sublime itself, can and do *produce the* aesthetic after-*effects* of both their terrible grandeur and brutal trauma. As a result, the "hole" that "was left" after the traumatic apocalypse of

Pussy's wounding becomes, in turn, "a hole in the world" (*Pussy* 120). The sublime wound of both parties will scarify into a "sign of gratuitous brutality," or a symptom which can permit "an aesthetic site" (Freeman 130) of radical, self-and-other reconfiguration to occur. Acker's compulsive creation of literary *holes*, hesitates, first, in a progressive utilization of beautiful narratives, preferring, instead, to advance only ugly visions, and second, *nurtures* the hysterical characters that she constructs in order to embellish upon their suffering.

Symptoms can be viewed as stylistic characteristics or alternative aesthetic forms, signposts that deconstruct yet reconstruct both text and characters. In the four, primary phases of the hysterical attack, according to traditional psychoanalytical analysis, the first phase, the "epileptoid phase," occurs when "convulsive attacks" are preceded by "aura sensations" that occur in the "*globus hystericus* (spasms of the pharynx)," appear as "lump[s]" that rise up "from the epigastrium to the throat)." In the second "*grands movements* phase," where "movements of wide compass" occur, the precursors for the third phase, argues Claire Kahane, the "hallucinatory phase," and the famous "*attitudes passionelles,*" are also given. "During this attack consciousness is often lost," she asserts. Finally, in the "terminal delirium phase, [or] the *grand attaque*" (Kahane 11), all prior symptoms begin to appear simultaneously. By comparison, an experience of the sublime first involves the appearance of "aura sensations" and a "lump in the throat" as typical reactions that a subject may experience in her initial shock at the "showing" of the sublime's presence. This initial "showing" is a movement of pure

fear, one that threatens to overwhelm her rational, perceptual sensibilities. Acker combines the symptoms of hysterical attack with subjective reactions to the sublime in order to literarily provoke a more intense level of suspension, confusion and terror in the postmodern masochist. O's realization that she is standing "on the edge of a new world" (*Pussy* 23) is an example of this fearful and awe-inspiring dis-ease. In *Empire*, Thivai describes his "aura" experience as an *opening out* into the supernatural world of the sublime. This transcendence results from his hysterical reaction to "light," or what is revealed to him concerning the brutality of existence, in general. He says, "I dreamed that the blood lying over the ocean in front of my eyes was light [and this was the only] light by which I could see" (*Empire 12*).

Typically, in the second phase of Acker's recollection of the hysterical sublime, the wider movements of the hysterical body transmit into a "fight-or-flight" reaction once an individual confronts the threatening forces of sublimity. This is a physiological response to psychological and intellectual terror, one which becomes a "divine" immersion into aesthetic anonymity. For Peter, the moment when he experiences this "terror" is the moment when even discursive forcefulness cannot describe the sublime ambiguity of "it": "Call this TERROR call this TOTAL HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY," but "this TERROR is divine because it is real and I may sink into IT," he says (*Great* 70).

In Acker's third, or "hallucinatory phase" of hysterical delirium, the subject's reaction is more typically that of an exposure to horror. At this moment, "you can only faint or go into shock because "there's no way to prepare for horror," writes Acker

(*Great* 34). Finally, in the "terminal phase" of the *"grande attaque,"* the culmination of all hysterically sublime responses become the post-traumatic symptoms that Acker employs in order to produce the visual and intellectual disorientation of her characters and their settings. In *Great Expectations*, Sarah sees "red blue yellow green brown gray purple violet gray-blue violet-gray" simultaneously, for example, as "forms [that] move by in a faintly maintained rhythm," or "the pleasures of the mind" (Great 70) and the basis for a new reality. For O, an experience of the sublime is, initially, a frightening one where all existence is threatened once the natural sublime appears "in full day breaking the sky into two." The reconfiguration of everyday reality that she witnesses is both regressive and surreal; she describes it as, "full night's black" and morning's "red." This is "the terror of our primordial dawn," she concludes (*Pussy* 68). The newly strange and awful landscapes of the world and text become hysterically intimate with their subjects, and once the day and night of the sublime become dominant, its intense power can crack Pussy's "cunt" (211).

In contrast to an interpretation of hysteria as a state which precedes the sublime, the sublime, as both a philosophical and intellectual trauma, can also be interpreted as the ground upon which the aesthetic potential of hysteria can flourish. In his three standard stages of a philosophical experience of the sublime, Kant finds that the final, rational restitution of a subject's intellectual paralysis occurs because of a stasis between the mind's formal limitations and the incomprehensibility of the sublime. In this stage, a harmonious balance between "the mind and the object of its attention" is sought out,

one with "no excess or incongruity on either side [in order to] disrupt the process of representation," so that "comprehension" (*Zusammenfassung*) can be "carried out with complete success" (Marvick 65). For Kant, the second stage of this process is "a feeling of displeasure (*Unlust)*" that is caused by an "inconclusive grappling with *too much* or *too many*." Once the "collapse" of the feelings from the prior stage occurs in the third, a subject's recognition of the sublime becomes "contra-final" for the imagination. As it is now trapped in a logical regress, the imagination is called upon to serve the interests of the rational mind's limitations (Marvick 66). This restitution of the sublime effectively disrupts the continuity of the subjective trauma of the sublime because its rational "sublimation" represses the *displeasure* or *disturbance* of the second stage, literally freezing the subject within the terror of the "feeling" (Marvick 70) of the sublime. Therefore,in order for the production of "other" kinds of "elision" to occur, there must be a clear "response to this danger of stasis or fixation," writes Marvick (70).

Symptomologically, a response of this order could be the slurring or suppression of words where the consequential production of an alternative linguistic or scriptural *testimony* in order to represent sublime trauma creates a literary stasis or inertia that could possibly hinder the development of a text. Acker represents this central anxiety as a major theme in postmodernity, a collective and individual foundation of fear which underscores the causal consequences of sublimity, and in her depictions of rational forms of "terror" and terrorism, her characters and novels become situated within

strange states of limbo or "opportunistic positionless position[s]" (Taussig 13). [12] Further, in her re-negotiation of a "personal and personalized consciousness" (Ferguson, "The Nuclear" 6), Acker's form of deconstructive reflexivity permits Taussig's opportunistic "positionless position" to become an opportunistic aesthetic. In order to

---

[12] Postmodern existence for Taussig is a "chronic state of emergency," or another kind of "Nervous System" which does not resemble the "knee-jerk application of postmodern anti-totalitarianism bent on disrupting an assumed complicity between terror and narrative order," but is more an "opportunistic positionless position which recognizes that the terror in such disruption is no less than that of an order it is bent on eliminating" (*The Nervous System* 13). This chronic position is based upon an "apparent normality of the abnormal," and subjects who experience this state, such as the hysteric, sadomasochist and mad victim, comply with a modern methodology of rational influence. Yet, at the same time, these outlaw figures also find they are fully engaged in postmodern reconfigurations of all foundations of knowledge and its systems. "What needs pondering," according to Taussig, "is the violent and unexpected ruptures in consciousness that such a situation carries" (17). A fear of death by apocalyptic means could compel a postmodern subject to fixate on this threat to the exclusion of all other things. In Michel Deguy's analysis, the "mortal condition and the moment of perishing are always at stake when the *sublime* appears," and the sublime is always "the concentration" or "the start of the startling that weighs in speech against death" (9). The "relation between the sublime and the testamentary," he asserts, is one where "words are words of the end" (10), and the "beautiful disorder" of the sublime "is an effect of art" (11). Acker's autobiographical and fictive testimonials are excellent examples of Deguy's "beautiful disorder," works which speak only in "words of the end" by way of a *convulsive* writing of the uncanny beauty of sublime existence as Acker hysterically envisions it.

do this, she utilizes a hysterical "realm of the imaginary" (Kahane 10), and foregrounds it in terms of a sublime deconstruction of both the ego and its environment. The sublime, therefore, becomes a major factor in the work of this deconstruction, and in its "working of the frame," the aesthetic propensities of this sublime "produce/discover" deconstruction such as Acker's (Bernstein 171). Her *distorted* visions of reality routinely appears inside *dislocated* frames of literary composition or texts that decompose themselves, and therefore, Acker allies literary meaning and function in an uneasy marriage of deconstructive sublimity and hysterical art as per "a series of aberrations that can be treated like interesting psychological case histories" (Ferguson, *Solitude* 39).

The sublime's relationship to hysteria is an aesthetically and psychologically abnormal one. "The sublime can be treated merely as a symptom of a temporary peculiarity in taste," argues Ferguson, or as "an episode in melancholy which might as easily be seen as a wholesale attack of nerves or intellectual hypochondria" (*Solitude* 39). In alliance with the "powerful passions" of the sublime, those uncontrollable and unpredictable elements that characterize the state of sublimity, a disruption occurs because of those dynamic forces in the individual that begin to "press too nearly" and are "incapable of giving any delight" (Burke 51). These "simply terrible" phenomena, for Burke, "come upon us in the gloomy forest, and in the howling wilderness, in the form of a lion, the tiger, the panther, or rhinoceros" (Burke 113). Yet, a subject's final recognition of the sublime must also be an unreserved affirmation of its "greatness of dimension" for Burke (124), one that allows an "infinity" to fill "the mind with that sort

of delightful horror" (126) and finally producing a massive "attack of nerves."

A hysteric's reconciliation of the sublime, therefore, must be a combination of her realization of the incomprehensible difference of her body, as well as her uncanny adoration for this heterogeneous form. Unlike the way in which a subject "submits" to what she "admires" in the sublime, the hysteric may learn to "love" the new, and strangely beautiful facade of her body, or that which submits to her (Burke 198). When Pussy's body appears to open out to her doctor like a flower unfolds its petals, this is a revelation of her sublime "feeling." "The doctor moves his tool right inside my skin, then down my leg," she says, and "it emerges out of the skin below my right cunt lip. Then the doctor makes a hole in my inner thigh while I'm watching him. I'm thinking, I don't want what is happening to me to happen, and simultaneously I'm thinking, it doesn't matter what I think," she concludes (*Pussy* 171). Here, the masochistic demeanour of the hysteric is similar to that of a subject who is confronted by the sublime, and all women characters in Acker's novels, like their author, are particularly susceptible to the "dangers of a momentary discontinuity" (Feit Diehl 2) that often qualifies both hysteria and sublimity. Moreover, Acker's transference of autobiography into fiction, like Pussy's experience with the doctor, risks severing the author and/or subject "from the origins as well as the fulfilment of her desire by rendering her[self] passive in literary as well as in biographical terms," concludes Joanne Feit Diehl.

Only the sublime can provide "an experience that threatens to vanquish the poet [or author] as it challenges the autonomous imagination" (Feit Diehl 2) of both. In

the textual management of the sublime that Acker effects, the consistent strategy of "breaking up of continuities and the re-creation of an experiential duality" causes a site to develop where avant-garde authors must masochistically "withstand [its] accentuated disparities" and hysterically "survive such an upheaval intact" (2). In Fiet Diehl's analysis, only extreme forms of "silence" or "radicalism" can defer the more "masculine" qualities of this basic, sublime deconstruction, and "save" the female author:

> Faced with an overdeterminacy born of a relationship where her position as passive, receptive self mirrors her culturally assumed identity, a relationship where the authoritative power *is* the masculine other, she is either silenced by the incursions of the Sublime or radicalized by the process. (Feit Diehl 4)

In much the same way, Acker is radically altered in the presentation and/or composition of this "overdeterminacy," a breach which creates subjects with*in her* testimonials, and a singular subject/author who exists *apart* from her written ideology, both a construct which belongs to her text, as well as an Other/Deconstructor.[13] As both testimonial and

---

[13] Peggy Phelan's definition of "performative writing" is an apt characterization of this process. In *Mourning Sex*, Phelan describes this form of writing as both a testimony to memory and a product of suffering and mourning, both of which are motivated by an episode of trauma in an individual's life. "Performative writing is solicitous of affect even while it is nervous and tentative about the consequences of that solicitation," she writes. "Alternately bold and coy, manipulative and unconscious, this writing points both to itself and to the 'scenes' that motivate it. These scenes are fashioned and distorted in an attempt to say 'what philosophy wishes all the same to

confession, Acker's writing is reflexively performative in its autobiographical and fictive transgressions, always acting in accordance with the sublime. In her hysterical transgression of the beautiful female body and/or mind, Acker forwards a number of grotesque spectacles that effectively produce "the effects of the sublime" (Freeman 49). And once again, the duality between male and female constructions that underlie her basic strategies of material and sexual representation become clear in her texts' common episodes of vertigo or dizziness that seem to primarily afflict male admirers of conventionally beautiful females. This occurs as a result of a male recognition of the excessive details of a monstrously multiplied femininity in its surface and subtextual sublimity (Freeman 50). For Burke, this intense response to "beauty in distress" is also a

---

say'" (Phelan 12). But occurrences in the author's body are interesting to note as well, especially in terms of Feit Diehl's distinctions between male and female styles of deconstruction. For Phelan, a "writing about the disaster of death" creates situations where it is it "easy to substitute interpretations for traumas," and as a result, these substitutions "tame" the trauma of the author by "peeling away" the "interpretative frame" of deconstruction from "the raw "unthought" energy of the body" (Phelan 17). I would argue that a body in this process must be deconstructed, immediately, of its specific gender or sex designation. Rather than becoming unsexed, this body would oscillate between both categories while emphasizing the raw materiality of its "unthought" energies. Therefore, as is the case for Phelan, "the act of making" her book public, or of her giving the reader "this body of work" creates the following reaction: "I remove the illusion of the authenticity of the possessive that usually escorts bodies into sentences (his, hers, theirs, mine, yours) and render that possession phantasmic. (I cannot write "my body" anymore than you can read yours)" (17).

"tacit allowance of imperfection" (191), a reaction that is always accompanied by a *melancholic* conclusion (Burke 219). Kant's sublime feeling is also characterized by "a certain dread, or melancholy" (*Observations* 47-8). And further, in the "state of critical thought" that belongs to the sublime experience, a "philosophical neurosis" or "brooding melancholy" (*Lessons* 150) is always the result, asserts Lyotard. These three philosophical accounts effectively psychologize the sublime by qualifying its intellectual crisis as a "melancholic neurosis" (Lyotard 150). But more generally, aesthetics and psychology necessarily conjoin when sublime re-combinations of pain and pleasure engage a variety of repressive mechanisms within an individual's ego. This repression effectively maintains an aesthetic tension which acts much like a "sublimation of details" in a work of art that can produce a "sublime effect" (Schor 146). But repression, in regards to an aesthetic event or moment, always fails, because it allows the "order of the unrepresentable" to become represented through a "sacrilization of the detail," argues Naomi Schor (146-147). The distinctly feminine character of the detail is a powerful and sensual threat to the unity, harmony and simplicity of "beauty." Acker's sensitivity to this dynamical determination asserts that "sensuous beauty is its own perfect excuse, for it brings itself into existence," and in its "constant unendable sensuousness," it impassively "allows neither time nor memory" (*Great* 73). The "constant unendable sensuousness" of her ideal of (non)beauty advances an order of the ugly, repetitive, abnormal and fragmentary, taking on the form of her discursive prolongations of textual forms of displeasure or vice.

Additionally, the temporal fragmentation in Acker's narratives mirror what I argue is a hysterical and avant-garde method of literary dispersion, a "scattered perception of a generative scenario," where "a shift from a representational to a discursive model of narrative" occurs "when a redefinition of narrative coherence" creates "significant thematic relationships between disparate textual fragments" (Walsh 138). In terms of these literary interests, "narrative isn't a problem anymore," and therefore, "the form of Acker's work in general is not predicated upon narrative, but upon tableaux: she does not offer events but positions," concludes Richard Walsh (138-9). The kaleidoscope-effect produced by Acker's consistent utilization of tableaux is always intellectually and visually disorientating for the reader, and in their aesthetic transit, these textual fragments operate like uncanny flash-cards that rapidly increase the reader's discomfort or anxiety. "The more focus, the more narrative breaks, the more memories fade," and "the least [amount of] meaning" is achieved, Acker writes (*Great* 61). This attention to detail creates a dense and often ornamentally excessive style of descriptive writing. By advancing all forms of aesthetic dysfunction, Acker advocates a broad range of experimental modes of writing *and* reading, even to the point of meaninglessness. "How can there be stories?" she asks. "Consciousness just is," it is "no time," just "a narrative [which] is an emotional moving" (*Great* 58). The *hysterical osmosis* that develops in Acker's transference of concept-into-metaphor effectively condenses feelings of confusion, dread and fear into a melancholic and/or interpretive identification or understanding for her reader, as well as a hysterical desire to survive,

for her characters. And therefore, any strategic recovery of an artistic function or aesthetic method for either of these positions can be achieved only through dysfunctional means. This is understandable because "the feminine sublime is not a discursive strategy, technique, or literary style [that] the female writer invents, but rather a crisis in relation to language and representation that a certain subject undergoes" (Freeman 2). The female character and author who find themselves contained within the sublime must struggle to articulate a concept of grandiosity, but find that they are hindered in their need to confess this idea because of the "temporary failure or humiliation of the subject" that is typical of the sublime experience (Knapp 74). Additionally, a lengthy sentence of containment awaits character and author because the defensive nature of a hysteric's need to retain her secret subjecthood will force both subjects to consciously address their "own fictionality" (Rosenau 45) in literary projections of gestural incompletion.

The primary difference between the "defeated" or "victimized body," and the "triumphant" or "poetic force" of the sublime, asserts Neil Hertz, can be seen in the sublime's movement "from a state of "disintegration" into a "figurative reconstitution" of "terror into awe" (Hertz qtd in Freeman 21). This transition or transformation maintains the humiliation and rational stasis of its subject (Knapp 74). But for Acker, a reconstitution of the sublime *within* literature permits her hysterical characters to marginally *reclaim* their *will-to-make-meaning*. Additionally, once the hysteric becomes a sublime artifact, she "functions as an [absolute] antidote to the beautiful" (Ferguson

31), while also providing an example of a possible "resistance of virtue to passions, fear, [and] superstition" (Lyotard 238) that a sublime form of art can illustrate. The sublime or grotesque deformity of Acker's hysterical anti-heroines corresponds with their arrogant desire for intellectual and philosophical martyrdom, and as a result, they are "crucified from within by all that's intolerable in the world and proud of it" (*Pussy* 238). Yet, in the very constitution of hysterical sublimity itself, there is only a certain number of dysfunctional stereotypes available to Acker with which to illustrate a model of modern-to-postmodern illness, or alternately, a genealogy of female madness that is a physical, genetic and psychologic degeneracy. At the textual sites where these stereotypical hysterics, masochists and madwomen appear in Acker's texts, the postmodern amputation of the individual from the world refuses any deterministic diagnoses such as those of modern psychoanalysis, yet remain helplessly and accidentally involved in Acker's broader, literary descriptions of personal and universal apocalypse.

In these literary spaces, terror marks "a trauma that exceeds language" (Freeman 116), and fear of post-apocalyptic, post-capitalist, and post-human existence "exceeds language." A recuperation of some small measure of hope out of the *barrenness* of human life and the *desolation* of civilized thought is seldom evident in Acker's work. The psychological moderation of the apocalyptic sublime does not appear to follow her extreme portrayals of mass desolation and despair. However, in texts such as *In Memoriam*, there are many accounts of the recuperation of postmodern terror, from its

initial presentation in scenes of ruin and horror where the "dead grey water in that bright morning sunlight," is "someone's hair shining," and then, "rats" or other settings where "garbage lay on and just under the surface of the dead, grey water," as examples of sublime's apocalyptic force as also being "a giver of beauty (*In Memoriam* 235). Therefore, the interrelationship between beauty and horror in Acker's work "requires one to suffer" (Lyotard, *Analytic* 18) a sublime rendering and reading of the End of everything.

Additionally, all zones of illness or psychosis for authors, characters and readers are "space[s] of helplessness" that become characterized by a sublime "horror and a sense of numinous dread" (Voller 19). This is what Jack Voller describes as the "supernatural sublime," a phenomenon which questions or denies "the possibility of spiritual consolation." Steven Knapp's description of a sublime spirituality posits the correlation of humiliation and fear in an experience of the sublime as being symptomatic of both a subject's ambivalence and "delusion that would *will some* VISION *beyond all the bounds of sensibility*" (79-80). This "fanaticism" represents both "the aim and the destruction of sublime identification," finally re-creating what should be "the moment of identity" for the subject into "a lapse into bathos" (Knapp 81-82).

As such, any discourse of the sublime necessarily generates "an overplus which it cannot command or control," and the "sublime moment," which is also "the sublime object in terms of apocalypse," becomes closely connected to the specificity of the "nuclear sublime," writes Peter de Bolla (300). Acker's concern with mass forms of

annihilation reflects what Rob Wilson describes as an "imaginative terror," one that recognizes "the cognitive immensity of a transcendental subject forever free and ungrounded in nature, however immense, deadly, or anxiety-inducing" (171). This postmodern subject becomes masochistically transfixed by the force of the technological sublime in *Empire,* and as a result, she is a subject who unwillingly witnesses the threat of an apocalyptic force which can produce both destructive ugliness and other-worldly beauty. The post-holocaust landscape that surrounds Thivai, for example, is a beautiful but surreal atmosphere of "pinkness" is the result of a violent episode of genocide. "In the whiter noise the cops arrived so that they could kill everybody," he says, and then, "the buildings were pink" (*Empire* 37). And in *My Mother,* all urban landscapes are wounded terrains which have been transformed by the mass annihilation of all systems and structures of human existence. "There's no more education, no more culture" and "no more middle class in the United States," says Kathy, because "there's [only] War" (29). In yet another of Acker's sublimely uncivilized settings, Abhor and her imaginary lover are led by their "chains" downwards "through rivers of piss, into a narrow hall," where there is only "a coffin." "I know this prison is at the bottom of a valley, in an infernal pit out of which the fountain of light of evil gushes," she says (*Empire* 147). Even the simplest of human activities become dangerous challenges in the unpredictably brutal streets of the apocalyptic sublime:

> Winding streets lay all around me, streets too narrow for vehicles. It was impossible for me to know how to proceed. On each side of each street, I saw

> empty raised garages, huge butcher's trucks, warehouses. Factories without windows. There were no shops here, nor women. (*My Mother* 70)

The "terrifying vision of nuclear holocaust" which produces "the craziness inherent in the sublime's psychodynamic" (Yaeger 96), qualifies the hysterical behaviours of all subjects who are unable to cope with the persistent threat of absolute, sublime annihilation. The paranoia and anxiety that permeate Acker's surreal urban centres cause even the earth's geological processes to alter, and when the "concrete had been absorbing heat for months, cold air, coming from lost memories, sat on top of the heat and imprisoned it," all kinds of human diseases become trapped because they, like their human counterparts or hosts, "had nowhere to run" (*My Mother* 89).

Acker's sublime cities are centres of "anarchy [and] not of anarchists" (*My Mother* 98), urban sites where a "trembling before the *mysterium tremendum*" is a regular occurrence, and the "cosmic dwarfing of the self's power and possibility" (Yaeger 96) creates any number of postmodern illnesses, both physically and psychologically. New York City, for example, is a central, sublime spectacle in Acker's *My Mother*, a monument which simultaneously attracts and repulses the "eye" of the hysteric, the masochist, the pervert and the criminal. As an architectural agent of "pain and death on an unprecedented scale" (*My Mother* 121), the gargantuan character of the urban sublime generally "invokes terror and vastness" as "it sinks" its inhabitants "into the theatre of urban spectacles and the labyrinths of urban streets," those nightmarish city-spaces in post-apocalyptic literature such as Acker's, "which then evoke

reflections upon subjectivity" (Bernstein, *Celebration* 6). The terrifying attributes of what was once a civilized territory are also directly reflected in Acker's nightmarish portrayals of the "inside of the family," another interior which is typically described in terms of the material excesses of the urban sublime. It is "a maze whose entrances and exits are lost to those caught in its entrails," and "the family," like the city, "is foul" writes Acker, because "NO HUMANS EXIST HERE" (*My Mother* 122). The "technique of erasure" (*My Mother* 109) that the urban sublime perpetuates upon its citizens, progresses in alliance with the denigration of all individuals within institutions, effecting the total disintegration of both language and identity. Hysterics who are forced to inhabit the contaminated spaces of family, city and home, continually find themselves overwhelmed by the alarming "simplicity" of the sublime. In *My Mother*, a "blazing noon" of revelation provides the hysteric named Laure with a sublime restitution:

> For one time, all became as clear and transparent as blazing noon. In the blazing noon of the full of this summer I went to the garden: white butterflies flew above the canal bank, a swarm of mosquitoes came into my face, so much disappeared that now things were simple, I remained for a long time by this water's edge and I saw this life as I imagine it. There's nothing more to trespass. (Acker 113)

The blacked-out bar of text that follows Laure's monologue and experience represents a broader, terminal zone of linguistic paralysis and hysterical censorship in the text's universe, and her final destination, at "the water's edge," is yet another boundary zone

of no-language and no-feeling that is situated in the gap between death and life. Her hysterical symptoms effectively quarantine Laure away from the sublimity of the world *and* her unconscious self, and once she becomes isolated in the Zarathustran "blazing noon" of sublime trauma and its conclusive nothingness, she is effectively isolated "away from the visible, the ordered, or the contained." In her rejection of the world, Laure is, in fact, recognizing the tropes of the "sunrise of revolutionary energy to the twilight of entopic dark mounds" (Bernstein, *Celebration* 191), moments or events that herald her recognition of the sublime as a place of final and total terminality. As she is engulfed in the "clear and transparent" site of her isolation or death, Laure realizes, in conjunction with the winding-down of Acker's narrative, that there's "nothing more to trespass." Whenever the sublime appears "in contexts of serenity or intimacy" (Marvick 156) such as Laure experiences, a retreat from it can only occur by virtue of a hysterical and masochistic withdrawal. Cathy, in *My Mother*, dreams her life away in an attempt to survive and avoid the impact that sublime destruction has had upon her reality. But her hopes of being healed by choosing to live in the unconscious are not possible because "without dreams, the body becomes sick." Therefore, she finds she has "an incurable illness of the heart" (Acker 140).

In much the same way, Sarah Kofman argues that the difference between "a work of art that causes pleasure and one that causes uncanniness is the degree to which the repressed content is disguised," and where the first functions "like a normal dream," the second may appear "like [a] nightmare" (123). In unpleasant or sublime

experiences of an aesthetic nature, a "deeper pleasure," or "masochistic type of pleasure, [or] satisfaction (*jouissance*)" results, and this is a variety of pleasure that originates from "the very source of anxiety itself," writes Kofman (123). Overall, I would argue that Acker's characters do "dream" themselves into an "existence" of hysterical suffering and sublime ambiguity in order to avoid the realistic threats of pain or extermination in their daily lives, but the aesthetic repercussions that result from this repression are literarily reasserted, rather than subdued, in Acker's continual writing of what is often the material of dreams, rather than reality. As Frances Ferguson argues, "the insistence in accounts of the sublime on the subject's determination of [her] own death comes to be a way of underscoring the sublime determination to remove [herself] from the world of objects subject to accidents" ("Nuclear" 6). Therefore, the "nothingness" of dreams in Acker's novels is somewhat preferable to the hysterical paralysis an individual can experience in the harsh reality of the mundane world. For Kathy, she is either "alive" and "in love," or unconscious and "dead." "I'm dead unless I'm in love," she says, though "most of the times I've been in love nothing's happened so I dream" (*Portrait* 31). In this case, the refuge of dream only offers a conscious paralysis or pre-linguistic "numbness" which allows no "language" or "emotion" to enter, and cannot offer its dreamer the cathartic release that such an expression could give. In this circular dynamic, "hysteria," does indeed "save the woman" but only by allowing her to erase "from the mind and the visible," the traumatic projection of her pain" (Ender 15), while, at the same time, opening up the possibility for the

development of an active, if psychologically imbalanced desire to *survive* and *signify*. And similarly, Acker's hysteric is given the ability to resist a total autism or psychic suicide when she is confronted with extreme forms of paralysis that can appear inside the textual sublime. For this hysteric, the *other* "part of herself which wasn't buried" by hysterical repression or condensation, is representative of an absolute love of "danger and flesh" (*In Memoriam* 126) because although the "hysteric's language remains on the terrain of the suffering body that is to be described, it does not serve to stamp that body with an inexpressible profundity or to assert, along with the body's reality, its incomparable character" (David-Menard 18).

The composite character of Kathy/Yeats in *Portrait* depicts the constitution of a grotesque *thing* that possesses the fascinating traits of the sublime. S/he can view everything in the world as "incredibly beautiful" in a moment of its body's grotesque erection where the monumental nature of the masculine sublime becomes inscribed upon its effeminate sensuality. S/he says, "the minute I touch my cock I see an angel waving white wings in the air," and "I become terrified" (*Portrait* 70). The sexual organs of Acker's hybrid provide an ultimate example of a transgendered awakening of immanent, transcendent and visionary sublimity.[14] Because sublime phenomena "are

---

[14] Here, I am referring to Jacques Derrida's critique of Kant's more monumental descriptions of the natural sublime, in *The Truth In Painting*. The appearance of the "colossal" (colossus) can be interpreted as another symbol for the transcendent phallus. Erections in Jean Genet's *Our Lady Of The Flowers*, and *Diary Of A Thief*, are the primary and startling monuments that arise to worship the

in no way beautiful," writes Žižek, "they are chaotic, formless [and] the very opposite of harmonious form" (*Tarrying* 46), and "monstrous in the sense of the inexpediently excessive [or the] overblown character of an organ or an object," he asserts. Acker's explicit sexualization and desexualization of the feminine sublime exceeds the boundaries of female physiology by crossing over sex, gender and desire in order to provide a universally fluid version of sublime affectation. Her nymphomaniac's virility is dispersed in an oddly distanced account of her sublime orgasming: "I explode and my mound rises upward, toward the red-black ceiling, I see my mound rise upward, toward the red-black ceiling I see us come fast," she says, referring to herself as an "us," and then an "I" (*Portrait* 100). The hysterical *short-circuit* of her identity originates from the more general occurrence of a subject's obsessive, sexual fascination with the uncanniness of her orgasmic experience of the sublime. When the "explosion" of the nymphomaniac's orgasm transcends the particularity of her body and "rises upwards" towards the "red-black ceiling," twice, it is identically matched to the way that the sublime also "mounts up" into a "hysterical attack," according to Henry Sussman. In fact, both Acker and Sussman's versions of this post-Freudian "forepleasure" arouse "uncertainty and tension" with a "(post-orgasmic) relief" (Sussman 38). And in those liminal borders of perverse desire and sublime danger in Acker's work, the hysteric occupies feminine and masochistic positions between literary and aesthetic sites of

---

heterogeneous passion and profane desire of the homosexual men that possess and embrace them.

manufacture and menace that also reiterate the hysterical and sexual tensions that precede the textual decomposition or degeneration in all of her novels, and this velocity either *speeds up* or *slows down* the orgasmic processes of creative composition and climax. Decomposition is often addressed in Acker's texts quite concretely. For example, Francesca's body, in *My Mother*, hangs "from a long Tampax string attached to the bathroom ceiling [and] all the way down to the luxurious tiled vestibule below" and "her blood" streams "out of every part of her," making Kathy's "apartment smell like bleeding cunt" (47). The initial stages of degeneracy that Francesca's corpse undergoes begin to intensify once her sexual identity is bisected from her decomposing body, and the "jagged piece of glass [that] had cut her hymen, or identity, into two parts," is symbolic of the schizophrenic character of postmodern sublimity and hysteria (*My Mother* 47). The degenerate ground of this bifurcation serves as a warning to others, and as a result, it cannot be read as an affirmation of this kind of transformation, as theorists such as Deleuze and Guattari have suggested.[15] As is usual for Acker, the *illness* of the text can be seen in the decomposition of its figural forms, and these

---

15 Further to this point, Stephen D. Arata's discussion concerning the connection between degeneracy and hysteria focuses on the way in which the "hysteric is characterized by an utter inability to resist suggestion," especially in the form of "strong rhetorical patternings of language" (187). This allows a number of uncanny possibilities for hysterical composition in the symptomatic appearance of obsessive repetition and deconstructive writing, but not without a recognition of its foundation of decomposition, trauma and loss.

become represented by the *diseased* language and images she chooses to employ. This is indicative of an apocalyptic theme which qualifies her characters and plots. However, those fictive, hysterical bodies that choose to decompose of their own accord also correspond to these degenerative texts, and the reiteration of these two states of decay creates an "endless displacement" (Bennington 18-19) which illustrates the sublime processes of composition and destruction.

In her literary presentations of monumental forms of hysterical materiality, Acker appears to advance yet another order of sublime creativity as a transition from, initially, a visceral amputation of a blood and guts expressiveness, to a more psychological rendering of one's new or altered self. Portraiture becomes the hysteric's favourite pastime in *Great Expectations*, and the shifts in representation between her wounded body and traumatized mind are illustrated by the different shades of "red" she uses in her self-portraits. The first, "PORTRAIT IN RED," allows her an active role in deconstructing reality as she takes "a razor blade and cut through this artist in front of him," and "PORTRAIT IN RED draw blood and freaked out," initiates the material separation of her body from the world by attempting to interrelate her hysterical technique of self-examination with her brutal transformation of self-identity. On the other hand, her "PORTRAIT IN RED" is a less bloody representation of her inner self, one where "he kept telling me I was psychotic" (*Great* 101) and therefore, the third portrait is a psychological monstrosity. Here, the critical evaluation that the hysteric undergoes in terms of the outside world only addresses the superficial symptoms of her

mad Otherness, and as a result, this portrait is more traditionally sedate. Hysterical portraiture functions for Acker as these three kinds of repetitive transmissions which *invoke*, yet *sublimate* "THE DEMONIC ASPECTS OF THE WORLD" (Wolfgang Kayser qtd in Muller 6). The visual expression of both psychological and material crises foreground hysteria's correlation with the sublime, a relationship that succeeds in *shocking* the reader, viewer and voyeur by any means possible.[16]

---

16 The "shock" that Acker's portraiture attempts to produce is similar, I would argue, to Theodor Adorno's "shudder," an aesthetic reaction that is "set in motion by patient contemplation" of works of art that are "truly after-images of prehistorical shudders in an age of reification" (118). These images bring "back the terror of the primal world against a background of reified objects," he argues, by registering a "primordial fear like a seismograph" (185). Similarly, descriptions of aesthetic "spleen" (see Baudelaire, Breton) and its physical and psychological effects on readers, viewers or flaneurs, also reinforce Adorno's concept of the "tremor" as an equally disturbing experience. It "is a reminder of the liquidation of the ego" which causes the ego to become "aware of its limits and finitude," contrary "to the weakening of the ego that is promoted by the culture industry" (Adorno 347). David Roberts characterizes Adorno's aesthetic theory as a "terminal enlightenment of art [that] is situated between a Hegelian end of art and the avant-garde's explosion of tradition" (*Art And Enlightenment* 197), an illumination which creates a space for writing such as Acker's to exist. This terminal development has radical consequences for the "final order of the image" and "the situation of panparody or pastiche, of "absolute imitation (Adorno) [or] of simulation," states Roberts, because it hastens development of Baudrillard's simulacrum which "replays and reaffirms the nihilistic dialectic of the progress of enlightenment to indifference" (Roberts 199). This new or final "order of the image as simulacrum becomes the omnipresent form of indifference" (201), and Acker's writing

The "reflexive masochism" necessary for this portraiture is identical to psychoanalysis' concept of masochism, where imaginary "aggression is turned around on the self" and a "fragmented body fantasy" results (Moorjani 7). Such aggression takes on the appearance of an "orgy of destruction [that is] evident in a child's play," a process which is then "repeated by the adult projection of internal bad objects into artworks" (Moorjani). This orgiastic aggression initiates a desire to make art or re-make one's own self, and this desire compels Acker's hysterical masochists to be creative. Capitol explores her masochistically reflexive impulses in the destructive production of disturbing collages which can express the particularities of her suffering. The origin of her misery and its aggressive energy, however, remain a mystery to her, and the aesthetic composition of her pain becomes conflated with her remodelling of her own body and mind. "If memory is a tool by which I'm making myself, why do I make painful, even deadly parts of myself?," she asks (*In Memoriam* 186). Here, Capitol is similar to psychoanalysis' masochistic woman, the stereotype who externally incorporates "bad" objects into her artistic endeavours in order to represent the way that she, herself, *is poorly made*. Yet, Capitol's collages also make use of objects from her environment, or the more personal debris of her life, extending the critique of her

---

is a strangely beautiful or sublime example of the simulation of identity and its indifferent repetition in postmodernity. Finally, her body of work promotes a form of "annihilation of content by form, [and] the disappearance of objects in their representation, [one that] brings about the generalization of the aesthetic of simulation," as Roberts concludes (201).

hysterical egoism into a commentary on the various structures in society that imprison her:

> Now entering into the dream, twisted wires and bits of dried glue and wood shapes and one day the ceiling in her room had simply fallen down, and out of that plaster form she called it *war* and nail polish bottles from the days when she used silver and black and blues, were figures. Dolls she had received and made something of. Then smashed. Molded red paper and clay guts and arranged them over the carved-open stomachs. Disarranged heads. (*In Memoriam* 231)

Much like Acker herself, Capitol also begins to view herself as both an *object* within the world of her work, and a *subject* who necessarily exists outside of it. As she smashes the dolls she will later use in her sculptural works, she attempts to symbolically exterminate the base conditions of her suffering. This destructive process always serves a reconstructive end for Acker and her characters, and the equal balance she consistently draws between artistic death and resurrection, restates the precarious tensions between the sublime and the beautiful: "Now in her work she smashed up dolls and remade the pieces, as one must remake oneself, into the most hideous abstract nonunderstandable--conglomerations--possible which certain people saw as beautiful" (*In Memoriam* 249). When Capitol smashes "all the goddamn dolls again and again," she is actively asserting the heterogeneity of her hysterical constitution in a violent and compulsive production of a number of brutal self-portraits. These autobiographical representations are the only works that reveal the truth of "what [her]

beauty [and ugliness] is" (249). Capitol's transformation of *pain-into-art* hysterically reconfigures the beauty of the submissive, masochistic woman into the "most hideous abstract nonunderstandable" thing that exists (248). Therefore, the *beautiful* must become the *monstrous* for Capitol, in order to provide a realistic reflection of her material existence and constitution. And this process serves the ends of what can be read as a psychologically healthy catharsis because "Capitol thought smashing dolls was good for her," providing her with the means to produce a form of "art [that] she was frightened she'd lost," as well as giving her access to her larger body of anger, because "she had too much for one body" (*In Memoriam* 248).

Capitol is an excellent example of Acker's referral to a sublime, "panic body," an immanent form that survives, solely, on its own "violent, and alternating, scene of surplus energy and perfect inertness," a body that exists "psychologically, on the edge of fantasy and psychosis," argues Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (*Body Invaders* 22). Hysterical characters such as these are the "grisly" yet fascinating textual forms that exhibit "catastrophic signs of self-exterminism, self-liquidation, and self-cancellation" (22). Capitol's most energetic attempts to "lop off the consciousness of memory" (*In Memoriam* 264) by beheading all of her dolls, is literally a *castration* of her masochistic hysteria and an amputation of what has been constructed as her memory, identity and individuality. Similarly, Acker's novelistic decapitations of consciousness, in terms of promoting dysfunctional modes of communication, offer a distinctly postmodern critique that is forwarded by a fragmentation of her characters' narrative memories,

resulting a system and society that is plagued by extreme incidents of amnesia. In this case, it is valid to state that "literature spreads hysteria" (Showalter 99) and vice versa.

However, the loss of conscious certainty is not absolute in Acker's novels. In *Empire*, Thivai and Mark lock Abhor into the Bastille in order to re-condition her hysterical behaviour into a Sadean form of literary production. They routinely enforce any number of sadistic punishments upon her, in an attempt to increase her masochistic endurance. "We sat her down in some shit to learn her how to write properly," says Thivai and next, they taught "her how to slice up her thumb with a penknife blade" (*Empire 203*). But this conditioning only serves to ignite Abhor's hysterical independence, and when she escapes her metaphoric prison, she abandons the men's masochistic project, yet maintains her hysterical creativity by continuing to access those masochistic impulses that compel her to write or perform within the narrative. In this case, what Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe argues concerning the outlaw woman, is particularly true for Abhor. "The woman who refuses herself--to *appropriation*--is always accused of shamelessness," he argues, because she is, like Abhor, "something intolerable," "that is to say, *unbearable*" (156-7), especially to male aestheticians.

Simultaneously "strong and mad" (*In Memoriam* 69), women such as Abhor and Capitol adopt the hysterical constitution or strength of a wounded mystic or visionary by renegotiating their physical and psychological suffering into the ecstatic and imperfect works of art and literature. The refuse of childhood and culture that comprises Capitol's collages is also the "beautiful" garbage that ultimately constitutes all Acker's hysterical

artists and writers, and their works become perfect reflections of the debris that is salvaged in a hysterical restitution of masochism within the grasp of the sublime:

> Blood, touch of flesh, name here the sacred personages and holy Vestals: hair, eyes, lips, cheeks, bones, muscles, mucous tissues,organs that smell when dead when alive, garbage caught inside the living, marrow, air, water, limbs caught at their upper ends to the torso, ligaments. (*In Memoriam* 65)

The mystical and messy bodies these women possess, on the whole, are postmodern symbols of what Acker describes as a "beauty [that] is a representation of what's past, over with, [or] dead" (*Empire* 49). As products of the "hysterical sublime," these female characters are routinely martyred in Acker's novels, becoming material and psychological reconstructions of what is first, an "object of the sublime," and next, something which is beyond the reach of either the familiar or the understandable (Jameson 34). These metaphoric and figural forms are representative of "not only a matter of sheer power and of the physical incommensurability of the human organism with Nature," as Fredric Jameson asserts concerning the hysterical sublime, "but also of the limits of figuration and the incapacity of the human mind to give representation to such enormous forces." Further, the geographic settings of Acker's portrayal of the hysterical sublime reiterate the ruination of the bodies that are scattered in fields, streets and alleyways. These grotesque landfills contain not only the decomposing bodies of humans, but also the remains of their emotions, identities and sanity:

> Beneath the rubble and concrete, dead bodies floated in the waters of buried

> or forgotten rivers...Like pimples on flesh: dried human piss and dog shit on walls, half-dead animals under overturned garbage cans, middle-aged women passed out and frozen in the snow. (*In Memoriam* 51)

Acker's depiction of a landscape of frozen and dead, middle-aged women accurately reflects a male, capitalist desire for consumption which allows a routine discarding of the wife or mother's body. It also represents the reconfiguration of the feminine sublime into a cultural portrait of a hysterical Nature. But it is often difficult to locate a specific moment or event in Acker's novels where a definite reconstruction of the sublime occurs. For instance, Beatrice's body, in *My Mother*, can be read as yet another kind of ambiguous landscape, both a sacred and profane terrain. Her body is metamorphosed by the sublime into an unnaturally omnipotent object, yet it also remains as an object that has been tossed into the gutter. Additionally, the hysterical sublime effectively positions her both *inside* and *outside* of her own consciousness, and Beatrice's tragic fall is a compilation of both her catatonic death and sublime resurrection:

> When she came to, she found herself lying in a shit pool that wasn't going anywhere. Her hair, though she couldn't quite see it, looked as if it had turned into rat hair; lipstick was smudged; and her pupils rolled around and around. Everything was yellow. But these eyes were anything but dead: they were irredeemably hungry" (*My Mother* 39).

If hysteria is a "*mal du siècle*, a sign of artistic degeneration" (Showalter 83),

then its sublime appearance in Acker's work permits it to adopt one of two forms. First, it appears as a *dis-order* perpetuated by the chaotic or unpredictable character of hysteria which allows symptomological depictions and artistic/hysterical conversions of universal and particular forms of suffering and trauma to occur. In effect, this representation of dis-ease re-creates both the illness and its patient as *text or work*.

In its second manifestation, hysteria produces an artistic sensibility or predisposition which can then be correlated with specific aesthetic tendencies or practices which situate artist and writer within the abject. This is a process which recuperates "madness" as a "reality" and "not a perversion," as Acker remarks (*Great* 199). But this recuperative creativity must always originate from the creator's feelings of being "almost cut to the bone" (*Portrait* 289), or schizophrenically divided between affirmative and destructive energies or desires. Therefore, this is always a "painful project" (*Portrait*) for both Acker and her characters, one that is never absolved of its hysterically sublime constitution. Yet, these same martyrs also seek to "cut out the part of other people that hurt" them and their autistic tendencies remain as those frustratingly inarticulate and unresolved conflicts and psychoses (*Portrait* 289) that haunt each subject. And therefore, the destructive and anti-social modes of sexual and psychological expression that Acker chooses to use in her writing and depict in her characters, both consciously and unconsciously expose the underpinnings of

the potential for aesthetic restitution as well as its innate limitations.[17]

Generally, Acker's aesthetic is an avant-garde form of *literary terrorism*, as well as an apathetic and nomadic transmission of *art-as-war*,two positions which require and reflect the conditions and characteristics of the hysterical sublime. This is necessary because all postmodern subjects, characters, authors and texts, in Acker's estimation, "exist in a space *between* pathology and healing, in a time of great pain and suffering, in a world of wrath and rage" (Kavaler-Adler 384). However, in her autobiographical/ fictional literature, redemption can be found, and there are "moments or sites, both visual and textual," which are given to the reader where "healing *does* take place," and "grace does sometimes touch and move us" (Kavaler-Adler). But these moments can only originate from "the very depths of madness" itself (Kavaler-Adler 384), and in

---

[17] Linda Williams's analysis of sadomasochistic forms of creativity describes these as exerting "some partial yet important challenges to patriarchal power and pleasure" (*Hard Core* 226). This artistic activity presents what she calls a "regime of relative differentiations over absolute difference" through an "apocalyptic force," one that reveals "some of the more devious and indirect forms of subversion/perversion" (226). It seems that in the collapse of sadism's differentiation from masochism as it appears in Williams' argument would allow the assertive and subversive character of this form of artistic production to alternately employ traits or strategies from both positions. Though I only specifically address the masochistic qualities of Acker's aesthetic imperatives, I do so only in the interest of maintaining a close critical relationship with hysteria. In terms of actually defining Acker's masochistic method of aesthetic production and its products, I would agree that a sadomasochistic concept like Williams', would provide a valid, critical measure.

those textual moments where the most brutal, visceral forms of artistic restitution of hysterical trauma and sublime terror occur, Acker successfully reformulates pathological states of fear, autism and paralysis into what Susan Kavaler-Adler finds is a "compulsion to create" (3).

Chapter II: The Grotesque Teratology Of Aesthetic Expansion And Reduction

> Emerging with the concept of the Romantic sublime, the category of the uncanny grotesque is associated with the life of the psyche, and with the particular "experience" of the "strange" and the "criminal." (Russo 8)
>
> Not emptiness, monsters sit in flesh's halls. I know monsters and loneliness and they keep me alive. (Acker, *In Memoriam* 210)

The "metaphysical potential" and "hard, existential message" (Meindl 7) that the grotesque carries and transmits in Acker's work, is comic, tragic and sublime, often simultaneously. The "evolving context of Western thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" which reflected "an antirationalist frame of mind," according to Dieter Meindl, also created correspondences and contradictions in American literature that refer to "the pre-individual dimension of existence" (7) as an existential challenge, as well as the sublime threat of capital deformation of technological and social existence. The "political implications" of the grotesque's "heterogeneity" are a "redeployment or counterproduction of culture, knowledge and pleasure," writes Mary Russo (62), strategies which are strongly advanced in the "performances of displacement, [and] double displacements" of feminist writing, in particular. Russo sees writing such as this as attempting "to muscle in on the discourses of Lacanian psychoanalysis, deconstruction, avant-garde writing and postmodernist visual art" (65), by creating a number grotesque indications of its effective redeployment of the order of the normative. The grotesque is "only recognizable in relation to a norm," and

"exceeding the norm involves serious risk" of "probability and error" (10-11) as it discursively produces "artifactual bodily modalities" (Russo 15). However, these figural modes are not a problem for the environmental influences of the hysterical sublime that are present in Acker's work because they can offer the necessary aesthetic, or more specifically literary, terrain upon which the "unbound and dispersed" characteristics of the grotesque can appear. But metaphorically and materially, her literary utilization of the grotesque body asserts an order of "grotesque realism" that is, at its best,"dynamic, materialist, and unflinching" in its "view of human bodies in all stages and contours of growth, degeneration, anomaly, excess, loss and prothesis" (Russo 78).

Acker's creation of the grotesque body is a response to Bakhtin's theory of carnival which allows for the political and conceptual excesses of this form. However, as a literary response, the figural, metaphoric, and aesthetic implications for Acker's representation of the grotesque are monstrously situated in some of the more fascinating, yet horrifying aspects of the sublime. In texts where gigantic and non-descript female freaks and monsters comfortably coexist, the "fear or horror of the "opaque and dispersed flesh" (Brande 196), becomes textually illustrated through Acker's engagement with the conceptual grotesque. Formally, her style of writing undercuts "syntactic expectations, continually contracting subject and verb, for instance, or inserting appositives" (Brande 198), and therefore, is "symptomatic" of writing that emphasizes "the flux of desire that underlies, enables, and eventually subverts the illusion of significance," as David Brande argues (199). And further, the canonical and

aesthetic standards that are grotesquely deconstructed in Acker's novels are quickly and spasmodically reconstructed into monstrous characters' and textual surfaces.

The grotesque, like the monstrous, is also a composition without recognizable content because of its heterogeneous immanence. "The grotesque is concept without form," argues Geoffrey Harpham, nearly always modifying "such indeterminate nouns as *monster, object* or *thing* " (3). The monstrous and grotesque, therefore, serve as standard symbols for the deformity and excess of thought and matter. For Acker, the grotesque is first, a monstrous *thing* which exists apart from sensible understanding. It is both a "certain island" and its "hideous monster [who] guards a tree which bears godly fruit" (*Portrait* 70). Otherwise, it often appears as an immanently grotesque example of a technological hybrid, such as the Acker/Yeats composite (*Portrait*), which is a grotesque pairing of male/female genders, or, alternately, as the Kathy/Sade mixture, which is a historically interpreted hybrid of Sade's "huge fat white" body "with all sorts of diseases" (*Portrait* 80), and Kathy's rather undefined body. Acker also emphasizes grotesque invasion or contamination in such composites by inscribing the "white worms [that] crawl squiggling out of [Sade's] ass" (80) onto the fluid, legible surface of her text's corpus, for example.

In the "everyday indicative world" of the grotesque, phenomena such as these are most noticeable in the heterogeneity of women and their bodies," writes Mary Russo, "in certain public framings, [and] in certain public spaces," that "are always already transgressive, dangerous and in danger" (60). Contextually and individually,

Acker's grotesque females are identical to a designation of the grotesque as "always and everywhere around us" (Harpham xxi). And in their "endlessly diluting forms," examples of the grotesque such as those that belong to Acker, are an "increasingly invisible" phenomena (Harpham). But conceptually, immanent examples of the grotesque appear similar to a natural representation of the sublime. Here, both effectively *create themselves* and are *created* as a "species of confusion" (Harpham xxi). Additionally, in the initial apprehension of the grotesque, as is common in descriptions of sublime revelation, there is a "sense that though our attention has been arrested, our understanding [remains] unsatisfied" (Harpham 3). This moment is further enhanced in both cases by a recognition of the "irreducible queerness" of the phenomenon which confronts the viewer. As a mystery that is revealed yet obscured, the grotesque and the sublime always assert "a certain set of obstacles to structured thought" (Harpham xxi).

In *Portrait*, the "slow beginning rising white-yellow light, rising like dust from the street at night" (116), is an example of Acker's indirectness in regards to the conceptual nature of grotesque representation. Her depiction of the "light" and the "dust" of insubstantial conceptuality complies with Geoffrey Harpham's more general description of the difficulty of "apprehend[ing] the grotesque directly," where "curiously," he concludes, "it remains elusive despite the fact that it is unchanging (xvi). The grotesque also acts in accord with hysterical defense when it attempts to "accommodate the things left over when the categories of language are exhausted," and here, it acts as "a defense against silence when other words have failed" (Harpham 3-4).

In the same way that Acker's "tongue" may be "a letter" (*Pussy* 231), the grotesque also appears as a subterranean transmission that is tied, directly, to the female body, linguistic signification, and immanent forms of expression. The cavernous nature of the female mouth provides the ideal site for a "grotto-esque" defense against impositions of speech or surveillance. And additionally, the dark, subtextual, or subterranean nature of the "grotto" provides the sublime darkness that so often obscures one's view in her novels, creating other grotesque "accommodations" that maternally produce a whole range of monstrous characters. The "cave--the grotto-esque," the "low, hidden earthly, dark, material, immanent, visceral," writes Russo, are all emblematic of grotesque materiality, or, more specifically, the "cavernous anatomical female body" (1). Acker's grotesque bodies are enclosed spaces of textual sublimity and aesthetic hysteria. They are the ugly dolls who become transfixed and inert once placed "under the ceiling of white roses," a site where the sublime is seen to invade all children's bedrooms (*Portrait* 153). Under its floral influence, other sublime and grotesque manifestations appear, and therefore, "blue, green, and red angels" drop down from the sky with "their huge hands" hanging "over the buildings" (123). Additionally, Acker's grotesque females exceed the gigantic measure and surreal constitution of these angels, and indeed, they are more "a confusion of type[s]," that monstrously "show forth" in order to suspend conceptual knowledge or measurement (Harpham 6). In this suspension, the silence of hysteria and sublimity also characterize the grotesque. In the "paralysis of language" (Harpham 6) that attends the grotesque, an

inability to communicate its revelation produces a variety of inarticulate characters and behaviours in Acker's *Portrait*, for instance. Sophie Dawes' attempt to describe her voracious sexual appetite and her grotesque appearance as interrelated facets of monstrousness seem to emphasize the abnormality of her gender and/or sex designation. "I act too much like a man, I seem too forceful," she says, wearing only "men's clothes, and jeans cut an inch above the hair of [her] cunt" (*Portrait* 11). Moll Cutpurse is also inarticulate concerning the nature of her monstrously transformed mind and body. Instead, she describes her criminal and/or perverse superiority as the core of her heterogeneity. "I'm tired I want to be the Virgin Mary with a steel bar stuck against my bloody cunt inside of me are red cocks like dogs," she says (*Portrait* 26). Again, a confusion of types or genders can be seen in the presentation of Moll as both saint and transsexual, as "the black leather Virgin Mary," who, "for the rest of [her] life," only wears "men's clothes" (*Portrait* 28). Helen Seferis, who is both "a man and a woman" (*Portrait* 49), also embodies Acker's grotesque *crossing-out* of gender and sex designations because she is a physical and psychological freak who is neither sex but both genders.[1] And finally, Helen's grotesque body becomes as incomprehensibly

---

[1]The *crossing -out* of rigid and easily identifiable sex or gender positions in Acker's work occurs regularly in *Portrait* and *In Memoriam*. Incidents of transvestism are usually followed by the appearance of mutants, freaks, or machines that can then offer additional spectacles of deformity or otherness. In *Portrait*, Kathy and Peter routinely trade-off their feminine and masculine subject positions and characteristics, and in "I Dreamt I Was A Nymphomaniac Imagining" (*Portrait*), there is an emphasis,

formless as the oceanic monstrousness of the sublime environment around her. As a result, the mysterious coral reefs that stretch into the sea are mirrors of her genitalia that "look utterly strange." And those "black sea monsters skimming the surfaces of each other's bodies for their communication," are identical to her mythical, yet maleficent malformation as "a mermaid" (*Portrait* 42), monster and outsider.

The male body in Acker's novels is *more body* than he should be, or *more deformity*, as is often the case. As a result, when the male monster suffers *more pain*

---

through repetition of textual fantasy, on the dislocation, yet mechanistic substitution, of new forms of sexual presentation and desire. Acker's autobiographical, yet fictional desire for Peter when he is cross-dressed (*Portrait* 112), re-creates Kathy as "a woman transvestite who's wildly in love with the most gorgeous fag in town" (113). In *Empire*, Acker again depicts an oscillation between established sex/gender boundaries through the perceptual and psychological dislocation of Thivai and Abhor's unstable bodies. "In this female drag which made me look helpless, I went out to search for food and pharmaceutical drugs," says Thivai (*Empire* 178). And Abhor describes herself as a woman who "usually wear[s] men's clothes." "Why, I don't know," she says, "I'm not a Freudian" (*Empire* 115). Indeed, as is emphatically true of all Acker's novels, "genders" are "complex" literary constructions (*Empire* 179-80). And again, when the "flesh must be the mind" (*In Memoriam* 118), the mind, generally speaking, must experience a crossing-out of its essential or constructed certainty. These hybrids are monstrous, conceptual *after-images*, and the most vivid example of this deformity is illustrated in Acker's character of Heathcliff (*Pussy*), who is a man and a woman who possesses both a large penis, and an equally gargantuan vagina. S/he is a hysterically rewritten monster of sadomasochistic desire, as well as a material usurpation of biological and social gender/sex classifications.

from his physical abnormalities, he also exhibits far more psychological and sexual perversions than his female counterparts. The male freak is best exemplified in Acker's portrayal of Toulouse Lautrec, whose deformities in *Portrait* are classically monstrous and sexually (or artistically) excessive. Acker's Lautrec is a hideously deformed dwarf or a "deformed crippled beast" with a "hairy chest," a "huge nodding head" and "spindly legs" (*Portrait* 189), who is constantly preoccupied with sex, despite being in the terminal stages of syphilis. Acker's giant, male professors "who walk through the thin wood halls at night" are "boy-eating ghouls" (*Portrait* 128), are another example of male monstrousness. One of these professors, who is "at least seven feet tall," exhibits distinctly homosexual and perhaps cannibalistic desires in his avid pursuit of young, male students such as Peter. Finally, Jean Galmont is the epitome of an overblown, male sexuality and its grotesque power. He is described as a "beast" with an overly-large penis that is "tattooed with roses" (*Portrait* 149), an image which harkens back to the floral constitution of the ceiling (logos) of the sublime, as well as Jean Genet's concept of gargantuan, sexual erection of the male grotesque in the tattooed penis of the sailor he portrays in *Our Lady Of The Flowers*.

The apparent differences between the "colossal" (the phallic grotesque), and the "monstrous" (the gigantic female), in Kant's theory of the sublime, are renegotiated in Acker's writing through her conflation of sex and gender distinctions in accordance with the aesthetic influence of the grotesque. But these differences are often only "a matter of degree" (Freeman 109), because the colossal, although it "borders on the

relatively monstrous, is never quite identical to it" (Freeman 80). The colossal always appears to adopt the material form of the gigantic in Acker's novels, and it is first seen in her presentation of a series of large, technologically deformed characters, or, alternately, textually monumental figures which surpass the formal limits of representation. In *Portrait*, for example, Kathy's friend Rita is a "huge" woman or a "grown-up giantess who mysteriously" drives Kathy "wild" with passion (155). Rita's huge body reflects the expansive nature of Kathy's perverse, lesbian desire. In Acker's exhibition of grotesque automata in *Pussy*, the gigantic, robotic figures that dominate the exhibit serve as metaphors for the perversity and deformity of her text. The "biggest" of these machines is composed of two sections of fascist delight and enormity, and "each section was a German male punk who, like a giant plastic bird, dunked his head repeatedly into an equally giant plastic glass filled with water" (*Pussy* 107). Acker's deformed narratives also mirror the deranged consciousness of her characters, and as such, her thematic interests prove "impossible to narrate" (Harpham 23) because of the grotesque style of "Chinese-box narration" she utilizes, a model which consistently disrupts "the creative presence or put[s] the narrated events into question" (Harpham 90). When a text "appears to be a bundle of discordant elements with no effective dominant principle," "part of the responsibility lies with the historically accreted character of language," writes Harpham, "and part with the stratified nature of the human psyche" (105). Acker's *experiential and experimental* representations of the grotesque are indicative, I would argue, of her literary compromises between extreme

forms of grotesque deformity and discordant elements of postmodern identity.

Monsters are "defined most frequently as something of huge and often unmanageable proportions" (Freeman 87). Acker's visually deformed characters reflect equally distorted principles that prove fascinating yet disgusting for the reader of her texts. This reader is placed into the position of the omnipotent voyeur in this passage: "On another street, in an apartment consisting of one room, we saw a woman dying of starvation." "She was too fat to move, too poor to get anyone to help her" (*Portrait* 115). And because "it's better to be a cripple in this world than just a plain ugly creep who writes books" (*Portrait* 199), Acker finds consolation in all monstrous identification, both personally and creatively. In *My Mother*, the two "maids" who are "as fat as pigs" and equally ugly, reflect yet another dimension of grotesque disorientation through mimetic reproduction. When Kathy realizes she is "on the edge of existence" (*My Mother* 81), she also recognizes she is lost within a distorted universe of grotesque ambiguity, and the two maids, like Conrad's two widows in *Heart Of Darkness*, are emblematic of the chaotic nature of all formality. In *Great Expectations*, Kathy's fear and terror result in her ethical recognition of the monstrous Other. For Acker, this is once again, a "total human responsibility" (7) that must mediate the most visually grotesque presence of a "tongueless canvas-covered teenager" who "pisses into the quart of blue enamel he's holding in his half-mutilated hand" (*Great* 8). Once Pussy consciously recognizes that she is "looking deeper into those lilac and black realms" of sublime incomprehensibility (*Pussy* 256), this revelation is accompanied by the monstrous appearance of one the

most physically deformed girl pirates. These outlaws are immanent hybrids of any number of species and other organic forms. In a number of grotesque changes to the physical and emotional structures of both body and mind, characters such as Pussy are metamorphosed by "Nature" into "Abominable Snowmen" or other strange giants (*Pussy* 250). Overall, "being an adult means being a mutant," for Acker as well as her characters, because once again, the "bigness" of everything in the hysterical sublime is so "big you can't see its material" (*In Memoriam* 112).

The "unease, or disease, of grandiosity," that arises from the "order of the aesthetic," is one which "hovers on the cusp of [a] discomfort with the magnificent," writes Henry Sussman (28), and within the "magnificence" of the "original in-exhaustible beauty" (Jarry qtd in Harpham 14) that Acker creates, monsters are made. Representations of the monstrous and the grotesque are intertwined once "the deformed" attaches itself to "a theory of the grotesque," creating the "power to attract and repel concurrently" (Muller 8). But more generally, even the foundational excesses of the unconscious, as Arkady Plotinsky finds, "leaving aside that the unconscious is the site and origin of all other monsters," is "as structure and economy," "already monstrous enough" (93). The conscious construction of "taste," on a societal level, is also affected, and in literary work such as Sade's, as Plotinsky argues, "dis-taste" and "disgust" become incorporated into a "general economy of taste" that has already been established by prior philosophical constitution (93). Therefore, "our strong but ambivalent feelings toward those exudations of the human body that mediate between

self and non-self," writes Geoffrey Harpham, take on all "the magical outcast ingredients of witch's brew such as feces, urine, semen, menstrual blood, nail parings, and spittle" (4). And this occurs because "the grotesque is preeminently the art of disgust" (Harpham 181).

Judith Halberstam asserts that "the unconscious and all of its mechanisms are precisely the effects of historical and cultural production," and that "the body that scares and appals changes over time, as do the characteristics that add up to monstrosity" (8). As a result, "the preferred interpretations of that monstrosity," according to its historical relativity, are also produced (Halberstam). The monsters in the ocean that surround Ange as she sleeps in *Pussy* (62), could be read as a terrain of conceptual monsters which belong to modernity, creatures that may be less visibly horrible than those of Greek mythology, but figures that retain an intensity and depth in the containment of their shocking, material difference. While freakish children (*Pussy* 84) and physical mutants such as Dog-face, who is a rabid canine and a deformed woman (*Pussy* 222), seem more like characters from a science fiction novel, there are also more traditional monsters in Acker's work. For example, Ange, one of the women pirates in *Pussy*, is "the filthiest thing I had ever seen" says O, "for a sail part had been wrapped between her legs, then around one thigh, like a Kotex that's falling off" (250). She appears to be both "a rat" (*Pussy* 250) and a woman, as well as a familiar, historical outlaw. "The filthiest of all girls, [with] blood hanging like dead rats around her thighs, filthier even than Silver," is Pussy (265). Once again, Acker conjoins the rats, sails and debris of the

pirate ship with the innate criminality of the postmodern, woman pirate, in order to reflect a dissection and expansion of seventeenth-century ideas concerning the pirate as merely a single, human modality.

The "uncanny" is often closely identified with the grotesque as "doubled, monstrous, deformed, excessive, and abject" (Russo 9), where both concepts are "ungrounded and out of bounds." When Freud identified "the repressed itself as a foreign body" (Halberstam 19), all psychoanalytically "grotesque forms" were qualified as uncanny compositions that were created once "the alien outside has merged decisively with its victim-mate-self to produce a condition of such exquisite disorder that it is impossible to distinguish host and parasite" (Harpham 106). In *Pussy*, comparisons between visual "revelation[s] of the mystery" of monstrousness, and the monstrous understanding of all that is "strange" or "tainted" (84), originates from the viewer's psychological measurement of normality. For Pussy, others who are "stranger or more monstrous" than she are difficult to identify because they appear identical to everyone else.. This creates a total crisis in her individual identity. She says, "I couldn't tell which one I was. I kept looking and looking, but I could no longer find myself" (*Pussy* 85).

The "qualities that make monsters seem monstrous" become intensified once their "terrifying capacity to call into question the fundamental difference between self and other" is asserted, and this is most evident in "misogynistic representations of mothers" (Freeman 89). The grotesque and the monstrous powerfully merge in the

"misogynistic conception of the pregnant female body," providing an "unsightly and distorted" vision (Freeman 87) of grotesque uncanniness. A variety of the heterogeneous bodies of grotesque mothers allow Acker to make use of an opportunity to forward an ultimately familiar, yet excessive symbol of grotesque generation and deformation. In *Great Expectations*, Peter's mother is gigantic and ugly; he describes her "thighs" as being "large [and] pock-marked," indicating "a heavy ass [with] extra flesh at the sides of the thighs," while "the flesh directly above [her] cunt seems paler than it has to be," "so pale, it's fragile." Here, "at the edge of ugliness" or "the whole" (9), her monstrous exteriority serves as a mirror or reflection of her internal deformity, "so no matter how my mother acts," says Peter, "she's a monster." "Everything" in the world, for Peter, is therefore "a monster" that he "hates" and wants to escape, in the same way that his childhood avoidance or escapism allowed him to evade "the Jolly Green Giant" (*Great* 14). Peter's realization that the border between his personal experience of monstrousness, and the larger "edge of ugliness," which appears on the precipice of the *whole world and/or hole of pre-linguistic* existence, is separated by the limits of his mother's body and the symbolic order which exists outside of it. The grotesque, maternal body is "not only the very incarnation of monstrosity," but also "a vision of what theory itself might become did its authors not struggle successfully to keep it within bounds" (Freeman 88). And the vision of "the mother's body, as it figures simultaneously [as] demarcation and dissolution of identity," initiates the "cultural project of disrupting the political economy of the sign as it is produced in

dominant discourse" (Russo 67). The "fascination with the maternal body in childbirth, [and] the fear of repulsion from it," argues Russo, necessarily constitutes the social dimension of the grotesque, in particular, its appearance "as a privileged site of liminality and defilement" (64). For Acker, "Mother" is always a site of material transgression and horror which threatens to invade or corrupt her daughter's normative construction of female sexuality. In *Pussy*, this disruption results in the creation of a "world of animosity" and ambiguity for daughters such as Ange, whose mother is "a monster because human mothers always love their daughters and because she wanted to kill" her (*Pussy* 225). On the other hand, in *Great Expectations*, a daughter's "image" of her mother acts as both "the source" of her creativity but also its "block" (6). All daughters in Acker's novels must distance themselves from the monstrosity of their mother's bodies and the dangerous threat of their love. In the following passage, Pussy differentiates between her ideas of reproductive deformity, as they are attached to her mother's body, and her need to appear "normal":

> I'm not one of the monsters. I thought: I'm passing for normal; I'm as normal as any moral person...Perhaps instead of dying she had given birth to three freaks. I saw this. Three children, or things, scampering around a room...One of these children was so tall that the body below his head was a stilt. The head was falling off, almost separated from his neck. A midget sat around the neck. Tiny legs hugged a beanpole of flesh, as if they were fucking it. The existence and appearance of these freaks announced the revelation of the mystery. Thus of all

> mysteries. As if *to find out* was simply *to see*, I found out that I'm one of the tainted. (*Pussy* 84)

Children, for Acker, are always raised by their monstrous parents without religious guidance, truthful knowledge or selfless love. This, in itself, is the origin of all postmodern apathy, because these children grow into adults who accept the "distortion, [and] the fusion of the animate and inanimate, the mingling of dream and reality, and the horror [un]relieved by laughter" (Muller 57). *My Mother* is a nightmarish universe of dysfunction, violence, and disorder that begins with two parents' sadistic conditioning of their child's psyche in order to promote Acker's existential grotesque. One that they, themselves, were also subject to when they were children. Kathy's mother is born and lives "in Heaven," where she uses her "cap gun" "to blind pigeons" (11), and then becomes reborn into "Hell," where she realizes, at the age of eight, that she is "no longer human" but is, instead, a "many-legged, a spider, a hedgehog, a raccoon" or "every animal I'll ever want to be and every animal that is" (*My Mother* 13).

Acker's personal identification with the "Black Tarantula" is also one that originates from a matrilineage of grotesque inheritance. In "The Childlike Life Of The Black Tarantula By The Black Tarantula," she closely identifies with Sade, whom she describes as a "fat, black" spider who is "imprisoned, both blind and celibate (*Portrait* 82). This tarantula functions as an effeminate metaphor for her creative madness and vulnerable monstrousness. Everything around her becomes part of this spider's web and its activity. Her apartment windows become its "two huge eyes staring" and its

white walls transform into the "walls of an asylum, hospital," or alternately, "the legs of a huge spider" (*Portrait* 36). These serial transformations reiterate the structure of the monster's web and Acker's aesthetic activities of allusion and circularity.

The character of Helen Seferis also seeks to identify with the tarantula by attempting to transform herself, in a similar transitional process, into a huge arachnid. First, she forgets who she is, and next, as she begins to teleport or "float" outside of her old identity, she transports herself into the spider's body (*Portrait* 50). This form of demonic transfer allows her to adopt the patient voraciousness of her new body and its desires. "Like a fat spider I sit and wait. I float," she says (57). The hermaphrodite Kathy/Yeats is also described by Acker as a huge male/female spider. It is "brown very thick skin tender low breasts with huge violet nipples the skin below them curves downwards over man's hips to heavy long spider's legs" (*Portrait* 72). In her movement from spiders to other animals, Acker's *transformative grotesque* allows the composition of many other kinds of sublime oddities to appear. Again, in *My Mother*, Kathy's mother magically metamorphoses into an unformed animal/Other when she becomes trapped inside a very strange garden. The primordial origins for her mother's monstrous transformation appear to comply with this garden's potential for abnormal or unnatural forms of growth. In "the summer air in the grotto," her mother notices that something "like a blind cat walks down" her "stomach," and once she begins to press herself "between a gray-red wall and its ivy growing up from the ground" (13), her body loses all immanent definition. In these grotesque forms of "de-grading" (Harpham 10), the

re-creation of the world into a sublime garden occurs because of a deprivation of meaning in "a world which is ruthless and cruel." In this universe, "the only consolation" which "characters have is an ability to exploit others through violence" (Muller 84). "Violent figure[s]" such as these, frequently become "extension[s] of the world which [they] inhabit," writes Muller, and their "spiritual desolation is reflected in the very landscape through which [they] move, for in this landscape images of violence and disorder prevail," he concludes (81).

A correlation between the mechanistic world of technological cruelty, and the appearance of grotesquely hybridized machines/humans, represents the form of sublime terror which produces a collective and monstrous form of cultural anxiety. *In Memoriam* contains numerous examples of the technological sublime's deterministic deformity of organic bodies. Airplane hears "her own noises coming out and lying like animals in her nostrils and mouth," and these "mule noises" quickly transform into more mechanical ones once her body becomes "a drilling machine," and she is neither "animal" nor human, but a "thing, against him against him." She exclaims, "I'm a machine I'm a machine I'm out of control." And then her sexual metamorphosis is described as: "boom the orgasm just came it was large it made her into it" (*In Memoriam* 120). The final stage of orgasmic frenzy in this process indicates that her transformation from human-into-non-human-into machine has been successful. In *Empire*, Thivai finds himself surrounded by a number of grotesque spectacles that mirror his own deformities. He says, "as for cripples beggars malformed bodies

lobotomized women and other poor people, everytime I saw one of these living turds on the street I breathed so hard to avoid convulsing I almost convulsed" (30). These freaks or "living turds" are the more extreme, material manifestations of monstrous excess and grotesque spectacle, and as is the case with all fascinating yet disgusting forms of debris, these monsters are made of the stuff of a more universal heterogeneity.

Dieter Meindl argues that within the "metaphysics of depth and descent," the grotesque represents "the fragmented American psyche," creating a "legacy" which is responsible for shaping the American novel's preoccupation with the grotesque (5). Postmodern, American obsessions with literary experimentalism are grounded in the grotesque's "radical forms of alienation, contradiction, and disorder"(Chase qtd in Meindl 2), and these forms of alienation and contradiction are central themes in Acker's work. For example, Helen, in *Portrait*, desires to "write more freely," and make a "break" with reality in order to rid herself of her "damaged mind" (57). Her self-alienation and attempted reconstruction of her damaged psyche are the only contradictory strategies that can offer her a superficial "stability" (*Portrait* 41). Meanwhile, in Pussy's correlation of the "beauty parlour" with the "art gallery" (*Pussy* 197), again, the contradictory nature of grotesque production and/or representation is connected to capitalist and psychoanalytical systems of commodification. Bodies that are routinely remodelled in these two sites are subject to technological experimentation, becoming hybridized and mechanized, in a simultaneous manner, by Acker's aesthetic implementation of the sublime. Both reader and character are often left

doubly horrified at the grotesque spectacles presented to them in these spaces, as they are constructed within monstrous texts that endlessly mirror their deformation and suffering. In "The Childlike Life Of The Black Tarantula," Kathy's re-designed body is "a pudgy ball," and she either asks for others to "stick a knife in" her, or she screams in terror, yet "smiles" (*Portrait* 87). She must remain in the form of this hysterical "ball" of flesh because she is being held prisoner in "the black room, [or] the dungeon" of the world, a universe, as Moll Cutpurse describes it, where "rats scurry up my cunt nibble at my body," and "I scream, and scream, and scream" (*Portrait* 24).

In the final stages of the "existential" grotesque, the "linguistic grotesque" begins to develop, and the transition from modernity-to-postmodernity is given a new, aesthetic intensity (Meindl 172). When the provocation of existential questioning by the grotesque "dissolves" into literature, the "textual world" of the grotesque becomes dominated by representations of postmodern alienation. Dieter Meindl describes this transition as a movement from a modern, existential preoccupation with the grotesque, into a postmodern, self-reflexivity and playfulness:

> Ceasing to signify (however indirectly) the ineffable existential sphere, the grotesque, a self-contradictory literary mode, becomes self-reflexive. Or, put differently, the existential grotesque cedes to the linguistic grotesque, which manifests itself in the play of language, in the enactment of linguistic games, in the collision and super-position of incongruous discursive patterns. In postmodern texts, such effects tend to indicate the nature of reality--

> be it fact or fiction, life or literature, documentation or fabulation. The grotesque, no longer the index to Being--Being, which is ungraspable, but somehow benign and preferable...to nothing--adapts itself to the play of significational difference and deferral of signification, the playful movement of origin--and endless *différance*. (Meindl 172)

The shifting of one manifestation of the grotesque to another, according to Meindl, passes through "an intermediary stage" and in this stage, "life as a whole fades out of sight as an ultimate point of reference, leaving a grotesquely meaningless world that, however, is not yet necessarily perceived as a textual universe ceaselessly reconstructing itself" (172). Acker's concern "with a plurality of interlocking worlds, including unstable and fantastic worlds, as well as socially-determined, [or] overlapping worlds of work and leisure, of drugs and media, of alternative lifestyles and madness" (Meindl 175), qualifies her parasitical techniques of plagiarism and collage as grotesque strategies. Once the grotesque world collapses into the world of the text, "all worlds are [henceforth] founded in language," and all "worlds are [then] linguistic texture, texts" (Meindl). Acker describes this translation/transition as "a story plus a story" makes "a tapestry" (*Great* 79). [2]

---

[2] The "tapestry" that Acker weaves is representative of the world *out there*, as well as the constructed worlds or texts she composes. Dieter Meindl finds that the "categorical transgression" of the grotesque appears, primarily, in its ability to commingle the "animate and inanimate." As a result, it succeeds in marking "the ancient decorative" art of design which displays a fantastic interweaving of human and animal forms with foliage." This is, he argues, the most valid representation of the

The Miniature And The Gigantic: Grotesque Teratologies

The gigantic female body is always an extreme example of grotesque monumentalism. However, for Acker, this female giganticism is accompanied by a sublime unpredictability which emphasizes, exclusively, the more dangerous forms of female excess. "Giant nipples [that] are made to be hidden in mouths" (*Empire* 170) are oversized symbols of grotesque reproduction and sexuality. And gigantic mothers who are "dummies" and "piece[s] of jellyfish" are "the most disgusting thing[s]" in the world because everyone's "worst nightmare" is that they "have some of that jellyfish" in them (*Great* 24). Acker's overblown images of sexually aroused hags are also representative of the broad scope of fear and disgust which accompanies grotesque spectacles of aging and degeneration. The old woman in *Great Expectations* that begs Peter to have sex with her, uncovers "her long flat tits" that "look like worms" and are "hanging down to her belly-button," in order to entice him, but her breasts prove to be less monstrous than her labia's "lips part[ing] over her [big] yellow teeth" (*Great* 18).

"struggle of the human to detach itself from the animal world." A struggle that is "much older than its name" (15-16). Acker's textual worlds are part of her broader decomposition of reality in terms of a postmodern nihilism, and What Paul Virilio sees as the impending "disintegration of the world" is a process in Acker's texts which "permit the incorporation of the world within oneself" (Virilio qtd in Wilson 48). Acker enables one to "read the entire world" through the "body of the world," joining together both in order to create a "One," and once the body comes to simulate its "relationship to the world," the status of art and literature is dramatically altered.

The *miniaturization or giganticism* of reductionist or expansionist tendencies in art, literature and theory, effectively produce postmodern "teratologies" (Huet 108) such as those that Acker advances in her work, but only within discursive or visual systems of metaphoric and metonymic construction. In *Pussy*, a swarm of tiny, female robots from the U.S. Army threaten to exterminate all human life (242-44), while in *Portrait*, characters are mysteriously reconstructed into tiny toys with springs (169), or "weirdos" with ghastly, prosthetic parts or "tools" added crudely onto their organic bodies (*Portrait* 244). An individual's bureaucratic nightmare of miniaturization or reduction originates from a mass-market fear where subjects become "things" rather than "living" beings (*Portrait* 289) under the influence of fascist forms of capital commodification. In *Empire*, Thivai's body metamorphoses into a motorcycle to better facilitate his easy and rapid travel (171), and the technological sublimity of his grotesque metamorphosis occurs only when his internal organs conform to the spark plugs and wires of the bike's small engine. Acker's reconstruction of young humans into "little doll[s]" who "are going to hell" (*In Memoriam* 185) is illustrated in contradiction to the appearance of other, actual dolls, such as those that belong to Capitol, which become artistically modified and/or sacrificed in order to serve her hysterical project of self-representation. However, Capitol's Quixote doll or her gang of Nazi dolls are also symbols of a miniaturized version of history or mythology that offer the potential for a renegotiation of their significance in the present, one that reduces them to being merely toys and not historical threats. Finally, in *Great Expectations*, Acker's women, on

the whole, are "not female" but a series of "elongation[s] of steel triangles and bolts," according to Propertius (116), and these female automatons can be read as pictures-within-pictures as they too, become trapped in a world with "no expectations and dolls" (*Great* 43).

Structurally, the recurrence of "motifs" in an artist or writer's work appear as either "telescopic or microscopic," argue Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "giving characters and landscapes [gigantic] dimensions as if they were swollen by a life that no lived perception can attain" (*What Is Philosophy?* 171). This stylistic transformation allows "dwarves and cripples" to "*become* giants, like Bouvard and Pecuchet, Bloom and Molly, Mercier and Camier, without ceasing to be what they are," they conclude (171). For characters such as Thivai and Abhor, Peter and Kathy, Heathcliff and Kathy, Kathy and Jean, and Kathy and Yeats, Acker undoubtedly constructs *giants of mediocrity*, I would argue. "It is by dint of mediocrity, even of stupidity or infamy, that they are able to become not simple (they are never simple) but gigantic," and whether such characters are "mediocre or grandiose, they are too alive," and too monumental, to "be livable or [a]live," conclude Deleuze and Guattari.

The "miniature," on the other hand, "represents closure, interiority, the domestic, and the overly cultural, [while] the gigantic represents infinity, exteriority, the public, and the overly natural," argues Susan Stewart (*On Longing* 70). Our most "fundamental" relationship to the gigantic "is articulated in our relation to landscape, [and] our immediate and lived relation to nature as it "surrounds" us," and "this relation

to the landscape is expressed most often through an abstract projection of the body upon the natural world" (71). In this transference, "both the miniature and the gigantic may be described through metaphors of containment," where "the miniature" appears "as contained," and "the gigantic as [its] container (Stewart 71).

The gigantic's connection to the sensual world of the body becomes re-presented in the "physical world of disorder and disproportion" (Stewart 73), as typically (74). The gigantic emphasizes "a sudden expansion of the soul and the emotions," Stewart asserts, by promoting "obscurity...vastness, infinity, difficulty," and finally, "magnificence" (74-75).

Acker's giants also possess exaggerated sexual energies which correspond with their gargantuan bodies. Peter, in *Great Expectations*, becomes "so powerful" that he "isn't there" anymore (32), and other characters, such as Abhor and Capitol, are never described in any detail to the reader, yet their overblown passions successfully permeate their texts, without any reproductive generativity. Therefore, they appear to comply with the characteristics of a race of pre-extinction beings who, "in their anonymous singularity always seem to be the last of their race" (Stewart 74). The character of Dinosaur in *Empire* initially appears as a large, stuffed animal, who later becomes a gigantic, fuzzy, female prostitute whose body becomes exaggerated in a compartmentalized manner, and as a result of her body's expansion, her now tiny, sexual organs function as the small remainders of her prior state. The microcosmic and macrocosmic inconsistency between the parts of her body re-animates her perverse,

sexual desire. According to Thivai:

> I could see her cunt. Cherries were sitting on top of her thighs. One of her gigantic paws as if she was a wild cat grazed my knee in affection. I reached for her stuffed animal's clit...that little nothing of a tongue. (*Empire* 93-4)

Grotesque bodies such as Dinosaur's are "a form of the gigantic" that is always "a body of parts" (Stewart 105). The giant police officer that confronts Abhor is seven feet tall and has "pimples so big, it looked as if volcanic craters had dug their crab claws into his visage" (*Empire* 223). The microscopic details of this body that Acker provides, reinforce the breadth of the officer's freakish proportions. "His legs," says Abhor, "were longer and skinnier than his brains." The incomprehensible totality of this monstrous figure is recorded in Abhor's series of detailed observations of the smaller, more grotesque parts of his body that she can safely register in a single glance. Acker's expansion of the material bodies of secondary characters, as well as her miniaturization of collective, social groups, are evident, aesthetic responses to technological and postmodern deformation which produces the grotesque body.

Opening The Uncanny

The most common, visual "symptoms" of the uncanny's relationship with the grotesque appear in Freud's descriptions of nightmarish monsters, argues Mary Russo:

> The Freudian canon, with its "creature features" as case studies, is filled with horrific dismemberments, distortions, hybridities, apparitions, prostheses, and, of course, uncanny doubles. The figure of the female

> hysteric, ungrounded and out of bounds...is as foundational to psychoanalysis as the image of the "senile, pregnant hags" is to the Bakhtinian model. (*The Female Grotesque* 9)

Freud's "ghostly" or "redoubled" uncanny "takes up residence at the site of the maternal [body], threatening always to monstrously reproduce" (Russo 18), and its offspring is that which is strange or criminal. When "the grotesque turns inward," it is "the familiar [that] becomes the alien and the uncanny" (Russo 33). [3] Acker's overt psychologizing of the grotesque utilizes the paranoia and anxiety of uncanny marginality in order to promote a depiction of more personal crises in the individual. For example, Thivai's sister "must" be a freak because she, herself, believes she is monstrous, and "since her body thus had to be monstrous, she refused to go out of our parent's house." " She knew who she was," he says, and "since she was a freak, she was unlovable" (*Empire* 31). The character of Kathy, by comparison, only feels as if she is "a freak" because she possesses abnormal, sexual desires. "I want to fuck women, hamsters, trains, criminals, black leather I can't speak to people," she says (*Portrait* 89).

An essential aspect of this portrayal of the grotesque is its "eeriness, of the spine-chillingly uncanny" (Thomson 5). For in the "crossing and commingling of animal

---

[3] This *turn-around* concerning the familiar was, until the appearance of the uncanny in Freudian theory, repressed or unaddressed. Noël Carroll's analysis of Freud's theory of the uncanny emphasizes Rosemary Jackson's comments which contrast "fantasies of deconstructed, demolished or divided identities and of disintegrated bodies" with "traditional categories of unitary selves" (Jackson qtd in Carroll 75).

and human bodies," that is so often seen in Acker's work, the essential ground for all horror is produced (Gonzalez-Crussi 129). Acker's jellyfish-rapist in *Great Expectations* is "a huge jellyfish glop who's shaped into an-at-least-six-story [high] worm," a horror-movie creature who chases women "down the main sand-filled cowboy street" (*Great* 54). In *My Mother*, a textual regression to a primitive state of existence asserts Acker's horrible revisitation of new forms of human vulnerability and fear in post-apocalyptic settings:

> The beings down on the beach had others' heads, seal bodies, and yellow rubber seaweed tails. One of the monsters climbed from a black ropelike ladder over the sandridge of the second floor and walked toward me. His head was almost human. He told me that he used to be my girl's lover. This is the forgotten or nonexistent story, but I don't understand it. Two rubber men were climbing up, and onto, the second sand floor. They were malevolent: their tales were absolutely dangerous. They were coming for us so they could murder us. My girlfriend shrieked: because she was far more helpless than me, being half my age, she fainted. This was how I became alone. The rubber men started coming for me. (*My Mother* 264)

The evident lesbian undertones in this passage emphasize the women characters' anxieties concerning the primeval men-monsters that confront them, highlighting their disgust for the "rubber men" of heterosexuality who are characteristically connected to practices which involve condoms and semen. "Fusion figures," such as these, arise out

of "the perception that something is illegitimately *in* something else," and this "metaphor of co-presence," writes Harpham, is also "the essence of the grotesque," where "the sense that things that should be kept apart are fused together" (11). But more personally, some of Acker's characters immanently possess the illegitimate traits of fusions which identify the grotesque. Ange feels only horror when she describes her monstrous genitalia. "In my cunt," she says, "there's a little animal, a type of fish, but it's a mammal" or "a weasel-cat, who's hungry, [and] is sticking out its tongue" (*Pussy* 34). When the grotesque "attaches a creature to another phase of its own being," the "intervening temporal gap [is] so great that it appears that species boundaries, and not mere time, has been overleaped" (Harpham 11). A number of Harpham's "abbreviations or shortcuts" are evident in Acker's work as avant-garde methods that revel in both fictive and figural deformations. Acker's "odd boundary creatures" are capable of moving both "tactically and ergonomically," ceaselessly crossing boundaries of space and time in their extensive reconfiguration and replication of grotesque possibilities for literary representation (Russo 15). "These promising and non-innocent monsters," argues Russo, may be the "signs of possible worlds," but "like earlier manifestations of the grotesque, they are also grounded in the abnormal and the criminal (15).

The Criminal Grotesque

Grotesque alienation, as Dieter Meindl asserts, pierces "the facade of reason, normality, and certitude," intertwining "spheres of reality [that are] habitually held

apart" (15). The science-fiction horror of Acker's "homing-and-kill vehicles" offers yet another critique of postmodern alienation and transformation when the mediocrity of middle-class existence becomes a delusional fantasy of terror. These urban monsters-machines who unfurl their "two-metre-long metal ribs" (*Empire* 37), provide a concrete example of the commingling of nature with technological culture in order to more fully express a sublime and brutal Nature. In *Great Expectations*, however, contradictory elements of medievalism become mixed with the horror of a post-apocalyptic nightmare in order to emphasize yet another category of Acker's grotesque. In this case, a "bones-sticking-out cow is dragging a cart by glittering religious objects past a dead murderer" (*Great* 105). In "The Beginning Of The World," Acker's Cathy and Heathcliff are witnesses to the discordant nature of the brutality of the primordial world. When they climb down the "other side of the moors" and peer inside a house," "they see the origin of the universe in a scene where a "rich boy and girl" "dismember a puppy" (*My Mother* 123). "Cathy wanted to destroy the beginning of this sight, or world," writes Acker, but only *dream or death* offer a release from this grotesque reality.

When the grotesque becomes connected to an idea of evil, then "criminalities, which are understandable, mix with religious practices, for people have to do anything to satisfy that which can no longer be satisfied," asserts Acker (*Great* 107). The love she holds for her outlaw characters is one that she inherits from writers such as Jean Genet, who loved "crime," argues Michael Taussig, but adored his "criminals" even more:

> He loves criminals. Yet it seems to me that Genêt loves crime even more. And this is the point. For when I say "love of crime" I mean a love so strictly spiritual that it has to be carnal. For to love the abstraction "crime," there is naught else to do but make love with the infamous, the practitioners of crime. (Taussig, *Nervous* 134)

Acker, like Genet, maintains an overt fascination with pirates, murderesses, sadists, perverts and martyrs. But her love of crime and criminals also functions as a smoke-screen for the more evasive, authorial strategies she employs in order to remain disguised.[4] Laura Lane, Moll Cutpurse, and Helen Seferis are criminal exaggerations, female characters which comprise her collection of monstrous outsiders or outlaws in *Portrait*. Sade's presence adds a historical veracity, as well as a new emphasis on the literary transgressions that can transform perverts into saints, or criminals into artists. [5]

---

[4]Stephanie Barbé Hammer argues that Genet's autobiographical "confessions" in *The Thief's Journal*, reject "all of the narrative directions seen before," as they are neither "admission of sin" nor "a defense" (*The Sublime Crime* 162). The journal is what Barbé Hammer calls "a self-announced fiction," and as a result, my comparison of the more fictional aspects of Acker's representations of herself with Genet's autobiographical writings is interesting to consider.

[5] Sade, as Joel Black describes him in *The Aesthetics Of Murder*, was "not technically a murderer himself," but he "was certainly a social scourge" (197). Black cites de Beauvoir's comments concerning Sade's erotic aims in order to suggest that his crimes were of a different order altogether; it "was not murder" that fulfilled his aims, "it was literature" (de Beauvoir qtd in Black 197).

In *Great Expectations*, for example, all characters break the law and pursue their own selfish or perverse desires. Sarah is a pervert and voyeur, while Peter (Pirrip) is a more sadistic criminal. Alongside of these main characters are a host of other figures that offer a variety of transgressive and perverse traits. Characters such as the Taxi Driver, the Hubbie, Anwar Sadat, Sir S, Clifford, and Propertius, offers yet another of Acker's *collections* of notorious outlaws, and where Rimbaud is a sadistic deviant, and R the Rapist is a monster and freak, and Quentin and Jason are sexual sadists and perverts. In *Empire*, by comparison, Thivai and Abhor are only amateur pirates or thieves, but when they meet up with other travelling companions that reinforce and/or instruct them in darker, criminal behaviours, their outlawed passions intensify. In *Pussy*, Acker again utilizes the marginal figure of the pirate in order to advance her ideal model of female resistance as necessarily criminal and perverse. The anti-establishment themes and nature of her writing arises out of the "complex interplay of failure and innovation, subversion and affirmation," a dynamic which qualifies the more general characteristics of the criminal (Barbé Hammer 19). As Barbé Hammer notes concerning modern literature's treatment of the criminal:

> The literary works discussed here employ the figure of the criminal and the concept of criminality as occasions for the reader's own ethical self-recognition and self-discovery; they demand with an increasing sense of urgency that the reader reevaluate his or her relation to the society in which he or she lives. As such, they function less a studies of the pathology of the criminal or as

> didactic (or anti-establishment) parables, than as aesthetic and philosophical explorations. Thus, their very "failure" points paradoxically to their richness as works of art and to the complexity of the hermeneutic that informs them. (19)

If criminals and their specific texts are psychological and philosophical "explorations," as Barbé Hammer suggests, then Acker's historical and mythical rewriting of well-known figures is a postmodern reversal of what is "good/bad" and "truth/fiction." [6] Standard "moral" evaluations of aesthetics and eroticism invariably lead to considerations of both concepts as being "criminal activities" (Barbé Hammer), while the transgressive nature of criminal offense, in itself, offers the criminal the means with which to

---

[6] Further, I would agree with Joel Black's analysis which suggests that the criminal can be seen as "all that remains in the modern age of the sacred and demonic characters of the age of myth" (30), extending his evaluation into a postmodern consideration of the role of the profane and de-mythologized function of the Outsider. It is true that Acker's criminals and Others are the physically, psychologically, and philosophically demonic and sacred "children," in terms of their innocent rejection of intellectualism, morality, religion, and civilized conventionality. Yet, there is also a kind of uninhibited "rightness" to these characters as they exist in a "wrongful" universe. Can Acker's characters be considered criminals or monsters only in opposition to the established standards that qualify them as different or evil? Or are they really heroic figures in a criminal world? The characters that are neither fully evil, nor totally good, are difficult to characterize as postmodern figures of mythical proportions. Acker consciously places them within ambiguous landscapes and anti-establishment movements that are notoriously contradictory in themselves. Therefore, the "criminal and not-criminal" nature of these characters is typical, I would argue, of the grotesque and the sublime in their more conceptual forms.

transcend "his mundane social identity" and experience forms of cathartic or ecstatic release (209). [7] I would argue that Acker's autobiographical and fictive work is one long "discourse" which invites its readers "to identify, more closely with its narrators and characters than with those of nonfiction" (Black 226). [8] And much in the same way that hysteria and masochism provide the means for a production of intense and complex works of psychological art, so too can aesthetic representations of violent criminality result in "an aesthetic operation whereby we habitually transform brutal actions into art" (Black 5). Acker's criminal figures and their deeds offer a monstrous

---

[7] In "The Sacred Monster" (*The Trial Of Gilles De Rais*), Georges Bataille defines crime as an exclusive "fact" of the "human species." Above all, it is "the secret aspect, impenetrable and hidden" of all human life (13). Similar to a cathartic model, the "essentially theatrical capacity" of crime (15) necessitates both an *audience and a performer* who can experience these forms of release or relief. But in novels such as Genet's *Our Lady Of The Flowers*, there is not an evident air of tragic circumstance that could bring about a moral restitution, and therefore, Aristotle's model can no longer provide a morally capable catharsis for the reader. Instead, Genet's immoral world promotes only an "ecstatic release" (Black 209) for the reader. In this sense, Acker also allows no moral redemption for her characters or her readers.

[8] This discursive form offers an alternative depiction of reality that is more profane in nature. It is a world of pirates who "journey into nonexistence or *the world of the unfurling rose*," as Acker describes it (*Pussy* 37). This world is not a world of beauty and tranquility, but a less-than-rosy universe where "a rose blooming is [like] an asshole opening" (*My Mother* 151).

shock to the reader's civilized sensibilities. [9]

However, her criminal characters are often ashamed or stigmatized by their perverse tendencies. Pussy sees herself as either "criminal" or "motherfucker"(*Pussy* 76), and like all "bad girls" in Acker's novels, Pussy and the girl pirates are the kind of "bad" which "means *slimy* or *dripping with sexual juices thus messy* and *mean*" (*My Mother* 182). These pirates are criminal perverts "whose hands [constantly] moved under their skirts," girls who could not be "awake without masturbating" (*My Mother* 182). And further, these outlaws interrelate with the grotesque in a fully material manner because they possess "cunts [that] breathed" and genitalia like "monstrous clams" which remain perpetually "open" and "vulnerable" (*My Mother* 183), yet capable of snapping shut at a moment's notice. The "categorical incompleteness" of Acker's women outlaws is "also a standard feature of the monsters of horror," and this

---

[9] Bataille's description of Gilles de Rais finds that he was "conscious" of his "monstrous character" (5), and further, that he could not "live without fascinating" *others* with his monstrousness (64). Bataille writes: "Whatever there was convulsing in him aspired to the moment when those who heard him would tremble. Fascinated, in their horror, they would tremble!" Bataille also suggested that de Rais possessed a quality of "childishness," which was directly linked to savagery, a "monstrosity" mixed with a childish innocence and a psychopathic indifference (33). "Reason alone posits monstrosity, which we justifiably call monstrous from the fact that it belongs to man, to that Being of reason. At base, neither the tiger nor the child are monsters, but in this world where reason rules, their apparent monstrosity is fascinating; they escape the necessary order," concludes Bataille (24).

incompleteness is usually present in the amalgamation of detachable body parts, missing organs, or particular stages of "disintegration" that their grotesque bodies possess or undergo (Carroll 33). This incompleteness, in itself, is a symbol of the *disintegration or decomposition* of Acker's settings, narratives and language. In the following passage, for instance, sentence structure falters as the setting and characters become less and less substantial in their metaphoric presence:

> Iyemon started seeing his first dead wife's visage everywhere, just like some women keep seeing the face of the man they love, Love's obsession. He especially saw his dead wife's face, with the red eyeball hanging from a red thread of mucus, just as if human bodies in this world don't rot when they're dead, in streetlamps. When the lamps were bright, late at night, sometimes the rotten but not rotting face was on fire. At those times, holes emerged in its flesh. Simultaneously, water pipes burst through the streets' concrete. Through these holes. Through holes in the flesh, the faces of the dead stare at the living. (*My Mother* 106)

The decomposition of Iyemon's wife's face is reiterated in the decomposition of the city that surrounds them, culminating, finally, in a broader disintegration of reality that blurs textual distinctions between what is dead and what remains alive. Acker's monsters are the "products of art rather than nature" (Huet 5), and in her literary *freak show* of grotesque "types," she effectively illustrates the "confusions between art and nature, between *physis* and *techne*, and between imitation and reproduction" (Huet 24).

Chapter III: Technological Hysteria: Ecstatic Saints And Martyrs

> The appeal to terror is self-denial idealized and habituated, a re-thinking of an old cliché: Jesus is coming again--with a twist of apocalypse--and boy is He--. If there is such a thing as American spirituality, it is interleaved here, in the ways transgression and expiation are licensed as civic violences, employed for shaping--scarifying, exacting--the public soul. (Ingebretsen 212)

Technology is "the enactment of the human imagination in the world," and by "building a technological world we create ourselves," enacting what Robert Romanyshyn describes as "our experiences of awe and wonder" and "our dreams of hope and nightmares of despair" (10). Because the technological world is the work of "reason which reaches deeply into dream," it accesses the unconscious, and both secretly, and literally, affects the body. The technological also discovers and is fascinated by this body, argues Romanyshyn, "playing with the possibilities of its transformations" (11). The "symptom" of technology, therefore, is "a memory" of a lost path or of "what has been forgotten, lost, ignored, or otherwise left behind" (13). However, it is also a sublime remainder of the "shadow" of a darker, technological evolution, a phenomenon similar to the one that Acker depicts in her postmodern fictions as a force that complicates the rendering and existence of hysterical and masochistic subjects.

The technological sublime, in close relationship with symptomological and artistic innovation, presents itself as an intimate threat which seeks to "replace flesh

with function" (Romanyshyn 28), allowing many forms of martyred immanence to appear in writings or artworks that are primarily concerned with the technological invasion of the organic body. The hysterical body, and the "specimen body, the body of technical functioning," as well as the "medical body and the pornographic body," are examples of different aspects of the influence of the technological sublime on the basic premises of American ingenuity and invention (Romanyshyn 174), as well as the fragmentary constitution of human existence in a neo-modern age.

When the medicalized body becomes translated into the ecstatic body of technological transcendence, the fulfilment of both an individual's masochistic adoration of technology, as well as the abandonment of one's compromised, wounded body, occurs, in Acker's work, because of her installation of an expansive, grotesque, female heterogeneity as a base materiality that is both hysterically odd and sublimely objective. The loss of "seemingly fixed subjectivity" in Acker's representations of the broad scope of postmodern uncertainty, aids in the production of "uncanny" and apparently transcendent possibilities for authors, subjects and characters. Only "transgression," as the strategy that is necessary for the potential elevation of transcendent metamorphosis, can guide Acker's characters in carrying "human anguish a step further" (Pfohl 120). Further, Acker's advancement of the "negative sacred charge" of a martyr's suffering, garnishes this profane imperative "with a twist of apocalypse" (Ingebretsen 212).

Postmodern, avant-grade fictions utilize transgressive strategies in order to

successfully "inflame" their readers by formally and contextually disturbing any pleasant possibility for identification, while, at the same time, promoting "a shameless, indecent saintliness" which depicts and promotes "a sufficiently happy *loss of self*" (Ansell Pearson 69). This "indecent saintliness" originates from a state of aesthetic delirium that is sensually and transgressively critical in its nature I argue, a form of indecent constitution and composition which qualifies two kinds of saintly and/or martyred bodies in Acker's work. These two interrelated *golems*[1] in Acker's writing advance a number of "specular representation[s] of the human," versions that comply with yet renegotiate other nineteenth-century versions of the golem (Huet 244). And Acker's golems, like their ancestors, inhabit what Huet describes as "the abject realm of the phobic object," a site where "violence and reason blend" together. Yet unlike the golems of the past,

---

1 Marie-Hélène Huet's description of the uncanny nature of the golem situates its figural presence as always within the gaze of an other:

> The golem as double creates for the beholder the troubling figure of the uncanny. As double, the golem is a perfect *simulacrum*, and it exists side by side with the other; the model it duplicates yet at the same time fails to represent. (244)

Huet's golem/double is another metaphorical assertion of the technologically metamorphosed "other" or an inhuman form created from the mute, mimetically identical, and (non)representational pre-linguistic aspects of originary existence. Acker's immanent *originals* are always main characters that suffer physical pain, while her shadowy, secondary *copies* are usually cyborgs that suspend certainty regarding the fate or constitution of the body in postmodernity. Acker's generic descriptions of especially the former category of bodies, could be read as an attack on systems of representation that still privilege the original, organic individual, over the copy.

they are more likely to appear as the "ghosts and images" of literature and nightmare which belong to, or originate from the "formless, nauseating, intangibility" (Taussig 121) of the postmodern world.[2] Indeed, the intangible essence of Acker's work, as both a radically experimental form of literature, and a dislocated series of visionary (non)scriptures, allows the subversive saint to co-exist with its masochistic twin. These two distinct, yet interrelated ideas, originate from the same basic nexus of illness, suffering, and technological terror. They differ from one another in terms of their initial metaphoric and psychological manifestations, but they conclusively address two different experiential and aesthetic categories of terminal "apprehension."[3] And as a

---

[2] Taussig's "intangibility" is directly referenced in Acker's work because it is a development that occurs between the fascist police state and the sacred, a "monstrous mixture" which is "ghostly" and "rotten as well" (121). I found his analysis provided an interesting consideration of the influence of the profane upon the surveillance and control of middle-class existence that is depicted in Acker's novels as a powerfully corrupt omnipotence. Additionally, examples of fascist bureaucracy in *Empire* and *Pussy* comply with Taussig's analysis of this mixture, as well.

[3] Acker's saintly bodies are two distinct metaphorical or material forms that become differentiated by the particularities of specific illnesses and/or psychological suffering. This appears to correlate with two kinds of "narrativization" (Mary Ann Doane 165). The first is "an excessive narrativity as one of the causes of illness," and the second is "a constant incitement to narrate as a therapeutic strategy." Doane also suggests that what differentiates these two narratives of illness and recuperation is the difference between "fantasy and mimesis," where mimesis is "endowed with curative powers," and "the structuring effect of the presence or absence of a narrattee--the doctor," which, in turn, results in a narrative produced through specialized

result, "realities" such as these "need to be fictionalized before they can be apprehended" (Das 69).[4]

Acker's monstrously dissected texts and their grotesque imagery offer the conditions of a martyr's *suffering*, as well as the possibility for a saint's *transcendence*, and in this binary relationship, "connections that exist between the rhetoric of religious terror and the consumerist technologies of horror" (Ingebretsen xii) can *only* be recovered through these forms of textual death and resurrection. Two primary

---

interpretation or a narrative that the woman produces "for herself" (165). There is a strange mixture of these two narrative forms in Acker's writing. Either the doctor's prognosis is an absentmindedly terminal one, or the woman patient's narration of her illness is pessimistically charged by feelings of hopelessness or masochistic indifference.

[4]Das also suggests that once fictionalized, these events or things make "a claim asking for acknowledgment, which may be given or denied" in concrete ways with ethical consequences (70). Additionally, Vas also finds the "distortion of speech and the distortion of the body" are mimetically and intimately connected, and where "the language of pain could only be a kind of hysteria," the "surface of the body" becomes "a carnival of images" (86). Here, Bakhtin's carnival grotesque becomes the tragic facade of the hysteric's symptomatically disordered appearance, allowing her charismatic episodes of spontaneous bleeding and other physical sufferings to become recognized by others. This validation is necessary for the saint or martyr's desire for adoration and suffering. For Acker's saints and martyrs, such reverence or praise is impossible because the postmodern public is apathetically disinterested in the divine body or revelation.

characteristics of the "semiotics of terror" that develop out of these dualisms, are "declension and unwanted metamorphosis," traits which aid in the composition of "dark tales of psychic humiliations, collapsing identities, enslavements, enticements, spontaneous self-annihilation, tales of seduction, scrutiny, and moral bondage" (Ingebretsen xiii). In Acker's writing, these brutal phenomena are eventually "eroticized" through an aesthetic "conversion" (Ingebretsen xiii), and this sexual, yet hysterical conversion scripts her characters into inescapable positions as either unwilling witnesses or enthusiastic participants in her violent texts. These characters are consistently inscribed and reduced, first, by way of a literary sadism, on Acker's part, and second, through a characteristically masochistic fiction, in terms of their responses.[5] And here, the "actual materialization of the world made flesh," heralds "the repetitious beginnings of an ultramodern social world without end " (Ingebretsen 21) in Acker's novels.

For Deleuze, there are "two perversions" or "twin ways in which the monstrous exhibits itself in reflection" (*Sacher* 22). Each method or movement offers only escape

---

[5] Narrative can become affected by what Mary Ann Doane describes as "the woman's illness or madness" (166). The narrative "structure can easily become destabilized, [and] uncertain, especially if her delirium is allowed to infiltrate and contaminate the image," concludes Doane. This viral contamination occurs in Acker's work when the uncomplicated transmission of a mad-or-ill-woman's voice seems to move directly into the text. Characters such as Capitol and Airplane are mad subjects and agents who reconstruct the surface of their text (*Portrait*) into a body that is identical to their own.

or loss. In one way, a "new transcendent moment" of "an ironic, self-effacing transubstantiation" (Deleuze 22) allows the ecstatic, technologically vaporous body to be found. Meanwhile, in the "self-loss" of the other movement, a simultaneous "idealization and negation" culminates in a "downward conversion of the sublime" (Ingebretsen 201,208), leaving the material body of the martyr trapped within its oscillation between hope and despair.

The martyr's body, as Acker depicts it, takes on the appearance of a Deleuzian "plane of immanence" (*Negotiations* 146), and as a radically different kind of landscape, the superficial marks of suffering that it bears are re-articulated in the transmission of its hysterical symptomologies. The ecstatic body, by comparison, is a transcendent after-image of this martyr's hysterical sublimity, I would argue. It appears as "an electroergonomic double whose presence is spectral" (Virilio, *Open* 40), symbolizing the metaphoric and metonymic union of the technological sublime with a hysterical aesthetics. In their textual transition from masochistic immanence to transcendental sublimity, ecstatic energy and its transferential discourse dominate the material surfaces of both text and character.[6] Therefore, the ecstatic body is a composite of machine,

---

[6] In Maria Pini's "The Production Of Ecstatic Bodies," she finds that all "free" moments of ecstatic release are "carefully managed, regulated and monitored." "Far from being about the 'loss' or 'undoing' of the self," these moments are "clearly about the production of a particular ecstatic self" (Pini 176). The "production" of ecstasy complies with a literary process of composition which situates Acker's saint-sinner within utopic/dystopic landscapes. But it also describes the production of a saintly body. For Pini, ecstatic moments belong primarily to young, working-class British women who

force-field, and organic system. And in Acker's texts, this body typically fades out of sight by disseminating its delirious desire throughout the fragmentary pieces of the text and its narrative. Perhaps the image of a two-headed Gorgon or Madonna would serve as a better example of the way that these two bodies interconnect, in that, as both Madonna and mythical icon, their materially transparent bodies form a single presence in a terminal fashion. [7] These bodies were social and narrative ambiguities because of their "instrumental structure" (Murphy, Mickuna, Pilotta viii) and non-instrumental

---

"rave" as part of a cultural movement that permits releases. But in Acker's work, these ecstatic moments would characteristically be available to unemployed and often homeless American women who would incorporate self-destructive or dangerous behaviours or "risks" alongside of their raving in order to perpetuate a *consistent* plane of ecstatic experience in their otherwise mundane lives.

7 Ginevra Bompiani describes the "Hydra" as representing "sophistic deceit," and where the "Chimera" was "wrath," the "Gorgon" symbolized "the charms of passion" (383). The Gorgon was "interpreted as terror and fear" in Renaissance thinking, while the three Gorgons represented three aspects of terror:"weakness, great profundity or madness." But on the whole, the "Medusa" signified "oblivium" which not only "disturbs the soul's vision but utterly confuses it" (Bompiani 383). My correlation of the Gorgon with the Madonna makes reference to mythical personifications of sublimity as they were embodied in monstrous or grotesque female bodies. But I am also alluding to religious accounts of the ecstatic and transcendent nature of Mary Magdalene's maternal yet divine body of immaculate reproduction as a familiar example of a material/immaterialism. Acker's qualification of the Madonna as a Black Madonna offers an image that is more consistent with that of the Gorgon, I would conclude.

materiality. And as aesthetic creations that Acker employs in order to refer to the systematic transmutation of human existence which occurs within the technological sublime, they are also "invention[s]" that "eclipse [both] the dead body and the living body" in their assertion of "an image of life as mechanism, [or] as technical function" behind the "shadow" and "disguise" (Virilio, *Motor* 132) of Romanyshyn's concept of the technological imaginary.[8]

For Francis Barker, the schizophrenic subject/object of postmodernity is "at an abject inner distance from itself and from [its] ambivalent, supplementary body which has been exiled."[9] Its discursively bifurcated body is "a rootless thing of

---

8 Paul Virilio describes the individual who is managed, increasingly, by the sophistication of Virtual Reality technology, as "an individual dispossessed of his shadow" or a subject that is no longer free to construct any kind of mental imagery because he is "required to locate himself beyond screens that have vanished, in an artificial world peopled by imperative signals" (*The Art* 146). This is quite literally evident in the case of the Rule Book that appears near the end of *Empire*.

9 The fragmentation of the body and mind successfully represses the energetic capacities of its organic drives, effectively limiting its potential for subversive action. This creates a literal atrophy or a literary inertia, in terms of Acker's work, one that reflects a Cartesian deformation of the "dumb" body or the "machine" body, as Francis Barker argues in the following passage:

> On the one hand the dumb flesh, and on the other the mechanism, which can be understood, repaired and made to work. Both of these bodies have now been banished to the other side of the distance across which representation must now take place, expelled from the place of signification to the object status of what is signified, and both correspond to aspects of a total fantasy of order

madness and scandal" (Barker 67), a typical Ackerian subject who is produced as a consequence of over-technologization in postmodernity. In an era of "schizoanalysis," where schizo-bodies and minds demand a new order of thinking and interaction, all forms of "militant libidino-economic, libidino-political analysis" (Deleuze, *Negotiations 19*) become "schizoid process[es]" of "decoding and deterritorializing (23-4).[10] For Baudrillard, this schizoanalytical critique is also an "ecstatic schizophreni[a]" that can create a perfect, postmodern radical, someone who, as a "pure screen, a pure absorption and resorption" originates out of "influent networks" of terror and awe:

> No more hysteria, or projective paranoia [exists] as such, but a state of terror which is characteristic of the schizophrenic, an over-proximity of all things, a foul promiscuity of all things which beleague and penetrate him, meeting with no resistance, and no halo, no aura, not even the aura of his own body protects him. (27)

In her over-exposure "to the transparency of the world," this schizophrenic in Acker's work allows the transparency of text and the diffusion of her own material form to

---

> which the modern separations we have been charting inaugurate and attempt definitively to secure. (80)

10 Deleuze concludes this particular analysis by proposing that schizoanalysis "has one single aim--to get revolutionary, artistic, and analytic machines working as parts, [or] cogs, of one another" (*Negotiations* 24).

become correspondents in her textual experiences of suffering and delight. But more generally, technology's essentialist correlation of the feminine with technology produces a qualification of hybridity for both. On the one hand, technology is represented as "young" and "thingly" (Ronell 109), while on the other, the female body becomes the ideal site for technological modification. Phallocentric imperatives which seek to control nature become inscribed onto the feminine subject and her body in this translation, resulting in an aggressive extension of human invention onto Nature and immanent, female bodies. Therefore, what Donna Haraway envisions as an affirmative series of technological transformations for the female body-as-cyborg may, in fact, be a dangerous erasure of feminine integrity and the promotion of new forms of suffering in what appears to be a beneficent, scientific use of women as guinea pigs.[11]

---

[11] The image of the cyborg in Donna Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs, And Women* has promoted a number of critical discussions concerning technological reconfigurations of the female body. Anne Balsamo, in *Technologies Of The Gendered Body,* argues that the "cyborg image can be read in two ways: as a coupling between a human being and an electronic or mechanical apparatus, or as the identity of organisms embedded in a cybernetic information system." The former concerns only the " boundary between the material body and the artificial machine" as a "surgically redrawn" terrain. The latter relates to a boundary between "the body and technology" that is "socially inscribed" in both "indistinct and arbitrary" ways (Balsamo 11). For Carol Mason, optimistic descriptions of cyborg bodies assert that these are featureless, idealized forms, and further, that "the main trouble with cyborgs is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism" yet they are hard-wired, as it were, to remain "disloyal" to their parental origins (Poovey qtd in Mason 239). For Mason,

The female schizophrenic and her body, writes Avital Ronell, can give us "exemplary access to the fundamental shifts in affectivity and corporeal organization produced and commanded by technology" because she "inhabits" a variety of "other territorialities" (109). Ronell's comparison between mechanistic interventions upon

---

> Cyborgs are made of the stuff they are meant to be disloyal to, to disrespect, and to dismantle. It is important to recognize the extent to which this "trouble" can be exploited. Putting the cyborg's bi-textuality (its ability to swing both ways) in the context of abortion shows how disturbing this "trouble" can be. Specifically, it can disturb the dichotomies on which the abortion debate rests. (*Posthuman Bodies* 11)

The abortion question is something I will move gently to the side in this analysis of Acker's work, but the implications of a groundless form of fickleness in the cyborg's nature is a major characteristic of Acker's women-machines-animals. Any of the more vicious or treacherous actions of the women pirates in *Pussy*, for example, can offer evidence for all kinds of treasonous behaviour. The *bisexual or bi-textual* nature of Acker's hybrids may present a revolutionary model for the postmodern female and her body, but in the reality of her texts, the consequences of mixing *man-machine* with *woman-body* are extremely unpredictable or dangerous.

Indeed, John Law's analysis of the problems with a wholehearted acceptance of cyborg-culture seem to be valid to consider at this point. "For in polite company, despite Donna Haraway's powerful polemic about cyborgs, it is not generally considered to be a good thing to allow oneself to be 'dehumanised'," he writes (*Monsters, Machines And Sociotechnical Relations* 17). In texts such as *Pussy*, Acker vividly illustrates the perils of technological dehumanization, especially for postmodern females. And further, her horrific portrayals of medical trauma in *Portrait* and *Great*, also suggest that the pre-cyborgian and post-cyborg woman is always at risk of being categorically and routinely treated as a guinea pig.

human bodies, as well as her discussion of the hysterical and/or mechanical constitution of the schizophrenic body, are analyses that attempt to describe a number of relevant factors in the dynamic interrelationship of technology, psychology and the feminine. These large fields of knowledge are uncannily assimilated in the mechanistic designation of classical patterns of human behaviour. "We shall observe presently how easy it is to confuse a schizophrenic with a perfectly well-behaved child of machinelike obeisance," Ronell writes, precisely because "the lines separating the physiological from the psychological" are scrambled" (117). Well-behaved children or schizophrenics may offer positive representations of the marriage between human and machine, yet "cyborgs" or "boundary figures," as the functional examples of immanent "hybrids of machines and organisms," "serve as metaphors for another border" between "the artefactual and the natural" that negatively divide "non-human phenomena" as distinct from human existence, in general (Lykke 14). Boundary figures that re-represent the border-of-this-border, such as those that appear in Acker's work, are the cogs in the machinery of her text's consistent engagement with a number of boundary-crossing that substantiate the theoretical aspects of the grotesque and the sublime.[12]

---

[12]Nina Lykke argues that the relevance of "feminist cyborg stories" that "point towards subjectivization and narrativization of the non-human" serve as deconstructions of the "hegemonic position of the human subject of science vis-à-vis non-human objects and others" (*Between Monsters* 27). The cyborg in virtual reality "tends to absorb the material [world] into the semiotic," and this new "material is [then]

The basic connection between the schizophrenic and the machine was first described by Victor Tausk in his concept of "The Influencing Machine" (1919). Schizophrenic patients complained to Tausk of being plagued by machines of a "mystical nature" (544), apparatuses that produced pictures like "a magic lantern or cinematograph" which deformed their visual perception. Additionally, they also confessed that these machines removed their "thoughts and feelings by means of waves or rays or mysterious forces." This Influencing Machine produced "motor phenomena"

---

constructed as potentially changeable by semiotic, sign-producing acts, by programming and reprogramming." This characteristic "programming and reprogramming" is replicated in the obsessive or compulsive behaviours of Acker's characters. It also refers to the more mechanical aspects of the ego, as they appear in Freud's theories of repression. Additionally, virtual reality can be viewed as a counterpart to the postmodern text because it also produces another kind of "boundary literature" that can functionally "absorb" the materiality of the world into an aesthetic manifestation of reality.

If the cyborg "is a creature in a post-gender world" who "has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness," because in the "final appropriation of all the powers" of its parts," a transcendence into "a higher unity" occurs (Haraway, *Simians* 150), then it is the "final irony" of the narrative of "apocalyptic telos of the West's escalating dominations of abstract individuation (Haraway 151). And because the cyborg "is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity," it "would not recognize the Garden of Eden" even if it collided with it, and therefore, it remains a perfect symbol in Acker's novels for the disillusionment that characterizes revolutionary forms of "boundary literature" and its liminal figures.

in their "body--erections and seminal emissions, "creating "sensations" which became physically reiterated in the appearance of "cutaneous eruptions, abscesses and other pathological processes" (Tausk 544). But oddly enough, it was Natalija A., a former philosophy student who declared she was under the "influence of an electrical machine" that had "the form of a human body" which resembled her own, that substantiated the interconnection between this "suggestive apparatus" and the human body as "explicit" (Tausk 550). The misogynistic characterization of a woman's genitalia as a mechanistic apparatus, however, originates from a stable, psychoanalytical ground in Freud's account of the appearance of sexual organs in dreams (*The Interpretation Of Dreams*) as being symbolic of an individual's anxiety concerning technology, and femininity, as well (Tausk 549).

Nell Tenaff argues that in the moment of "becoming" technologically transformed, a subject experiences an "intense and cathartic (schizophrenic) hiatus," one where "the production of the real" and the "excess [of becoming] finds an opening, surfacing as a wounding knowledge akin to the enlightening wound of the mystic" (Tenaff 34). The relationship between delirious metamorphosis and sublime ecstasy is then mediated by a new form of desire, an ecstatic intensity that is a result of "an involuntary and stupefying experience, something very, very acute, very intense, with high levels of intensity," writes Guattari (86). As it is held enraptured by this delirium, this "body" of the schizophrenic suffers a simultaneous "breakthrough" and "collapse" (Guattari 90). The martyr's body, on the other hand, can actualize the mechanistic,

masochistic, and perverse desires that are innately situated within the realms of the imaginary and the unconscious, instincts that are "already there," yet continually being produced. The martyr manufactures and sets these libidinal energies "in motion, for they are desire, desire just as it is" inside "the social and technical machines themselves" (Guattari 137). The masochism of the martyr does produce some of the more perverse delineations of sublime desire, and its influence on a schizophrenic's behaviour may allow a whole range of material transformations to occur without her consent. As a result, the human body becomes "an imaginary object" in the martyr's mechanistic transformations because it "projects its vital energy into a totally mechanistic structure, where no surprises are possible (Deleule 205). And similarly, the metaphorical bodies contained inside a textual structure can be manipulated by the author in order to forward both an organic and manufactured system of symbols and images. The oscillation between the biological and the mechanical in these dynamical relationships produce sites of tension between the unconscious and the conscious organization of the human subject, author or artist, character, and textual discourse. "Imagoes of the fragmented body" within these tense structures are "aggressively" transformed (Barker 89) into "the torn flesh and the ruptured, separated organs,[as well as] the shattered frame and the severed limbs" of the corpse or corpus of literature, works which are later reassembled into "new, fantastic, [or] monstrous forms" (Barker 89), as is the case for Acker's work in terms of the grotesque. Texts can become mechanistically energetic fragments of systematically amputated citation and repetition,

and Acker's novels provide examples of the "intersection, [or] diagram" of this disorder (Deleuze, "Ethnology" 625) that results when these forms of detextualized deterritorialization occur. These diagrams are characteristically known by their "fast and slow speeds" (Deleuze 627), or more generally, "kinetic determinations" (631) of "an animal, a body of sounds, a mind or an idea" that is contained within "a linguistic corpus," "a social body, [or] a collectivity" (Deleuze 629). In their "particular corporeal relation to speed," bodies such as Acker's are indeed "both too slow and too fast," as Kristin Ross argues concerning the motion of the adolescent body in Rimbaud's textual narration (54). In their appearance, Acker's perpetually immature characters also routinely exhibit "the heavy torpor or seeming somnambulance of the body" that is "moving too fast" (Ross 54). And this contradictory form of inertia and/or speed reflects what Ross describes as an active/inactive resistance, a radical position of stasis which "acts out the forces that perturb bourgeois society's reasoned march of progress" (55). Further, the lethargic qualities of these bodies and their movements in Acker's novels appear in contrast to the over-rapid shifts in voice and perspective that assert the basic conflict between subject and world on yet another, dynamical level, as well as her dual modes of martyred and schizophrenic discourse which appears as a series of bifurcated communications.

The Martyr's Ill Body: Posthuman Suffering

Postmodern beliefs concerning illness have worked to effectively reconceptualize "the body's interior" into a new visual "landscape," one that is afflicted

by "contemporary immune system discourse," writes Jackie Stacey (173). Images of illness and its sufferers are particular to their historical and cultural eras, and any metaphoric allusion to a "historical" disease emphasizes the different ways that it has become popularly identified. In *Illness As Metaphor*, Susan Sontag's example of tuberculosis describes how the person with tuberculosis was thought to be "consumed" or "burned up." By comparison, in recent accounts, a person with cancer or AIDS is believed to have been "invaded" by "alien cells" which "shrivel" or "shrink" their bodies (Sontag 14). Belief systems such as these arise out of popular misconceptions concerning psychosomatic repression and its expression on a body's surface. And therefore, these beliefs are usually the cause of a number of broader prejudices that circulate in a culture:

> As once TB was thought to come from too much passion, afflicting the reckless and sensual, today many people believe that cancer is a disease of insufficient passion, afflicting those who are sexually repressed, inhibited, unspontaneous, incapable of expressing anger. (Sontag 21)

On a cultural level, therefore, illness "reveals desires of which the patient probably was unaware," and both a disease and its patient are constructed as potential "subjects for decipherment" (Sontag 45), as well as hysterical subjects disassociated from their own bodies, I would add. As such, "chronic pain and depression," writes David Morris, are "often linked and occasionally even regarded as a single disorder" or phenomena that constitute "an immense crisis at the center of postmodern life" (155). And further,

"immune system discourse," in the age of AIDS, Chronic Fatigue and other pain-based syndromes, is both "a linguistic deployment and representation," argues Sander Gilman (7).[13] Sick individuals have become "complex text[s]" which allow "the signs of [their] illness" to be "read within the conventions of an interpretive community which comprehends them in light of earlier, more powerful readings of what are understood to be similar or parallel texts" (Gilman 7). "Communal" readings such as these produce symbolic or discursive "signs and symptoms" that "construct the image of the illness and the patient suffering from that illness," as Other, monster or freak because they respond to a deep, collective fear of heterogeneous contamination. "Posthuman bod[ies]," by comparison, act as "significant protheses" to all forms

---

13 This discursive deployment and representation of illness into a correspondence-based system of information weighs heavily on Arthur Kroker and David Cook's prognosis concerning the "disease of sex," which is "Anorexia, Aids, and Herpes." These "poststructuralist diseases" trace "the inscription of power on the text of the flesh" and privilege "the ruin of the surface of the body" (*The Postmodern Scene* 13). And where Aids acts asan effective deployment of "social solidarity" because it results in the outlawing of "sex with secretions," it also creates "sex without a body." In the case of herpes, which they describe as "the electrical disease *par excellence*," "the network of the central nervous system make[es] herpes a perfect metaphor for the ruins of a processed world" because the central nervous system becomes a "technological media of communication." And finally, in regards to anorexia, a disease that occurs under the "sign of *Anti-Oedipus*," "the liquidation of desire" becomes interiorized by "the production of the "look" on the text [or surface] of the (disappearing) body" (Kroker and Cook 13).

of cultural discourse concerned with the monstrous, and because these bodies are *invented* rather than *invaded*, they are less pathetic in their suffering, but far more dangerous in their difference, than ordinarily ill individuals. The posthuman body, therefore, "is a technology, a screen, [or] a projected image" (Halberstam and Livingston 2), as well as "a contaminated body, a deadly body, a techno-body," and finally, "a queer body" (3).

When "we no longer know where lies the line that divides our normal, reliable world," from the world of the ill, which is "the fearful, the terrifying, [and] the aggressive," the diseased individual represents that which must be contained and surveyed (Gilman 13). Part of this methodology of control involves a sentimentalization of the patient's suffering in order to mask cultural fears of contagion. As both "utopian" and "dehumanizing," hegemonic discourses which address the appearance of illness in postmodernity do not fully refute the effects of "illnesses that twist and distort the human figure" (Morris 168). But instead, they classify these anomalies as the "vaguely disreputable signs of failure," usually on the part of the weak individual who is sick, and therefore, they are treated "with silence and denial" (Morris). James Porter finds that the usual desire for a "(non)encounter with disablement" in healthy individuals occurs as a result of their deeper, psychological "defense against the realities of bodies," a mechanism that creates "a fascination" with disablement (Porter xiii) or, alternately, a "fashionable exoticism" of "the mutilated body, the obscene body, [and] the body in pleasure and pain" (Morris 168). Acker's representations of ill bodies corresponds with

a broader concept of textual bodies that is driven by fascination, mystery, and the appearance of the grotesque because they too, are "too much a body, too real, too corporeal" (Porter xiii). It is primarily female bodies that become seriously ill in Acker's novels, those typically feminine subjects who are both alienated by cultural rejections of their pain, and unable to address their "own incomprehension in the face of [their] disability" (Porter xiv).

"As the body breaks down, it becomes increasingly the object of attention, usurping the place of all other objects" (Scarry 32), and for Acker, the disintegration of all language mimics this process. In passages where characters such as O and Airplane suffer painful, medical surveillance, this pain becomes "immediately *transformed* into something visible" or "identifiable in *"my body"* (Starobinski 384), taking on the appearance of a sublime product of textual or discursive deployment which is a *"terrible object""* (385). The "illumination" that pain such as this can produce occurs as a result of its "amplification" (Starobinski 384), and its intensification transfers "a property [directly] to the body, a privilege that mystical tradition [had always] attributed to the mind," argues Jean Starobinski. The body in pain, therefore, is always a "site of a revelation--but a revelation for which it is itself the source," she concludes (Starobinski 384). This body's overwhelming desire for ecstatic relief successfully conjoins Acker's martyrs and saints, as well as her characters and narratives. For Elaine Scarry, the "story of physical pain becomes as well a story about the expansive nature of human sentience, [or] the felt-fact of aliveness" which "opens into the wider frame of invention

(20). Yet, "intense pain is also language-destroying: [and] as the content of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language disintegrates" (Scarry 35). In Third World testimonies which are re-interpreted in First World critiques, assertions that "language, the body, [and] truth" are recurring "figures" which create a "phraseology about the body and language which is heard in the dominant countries" and not at the site of their origins. As a result, First World accounts such as Scarry's, argues Nacunan Saez, cannot articulate the "work" of torture" as an essentially "counter-productive" event (139-40). For Saez, Scarry's arguments concerning the pain of torture as something which "subtracts the victim from the realm of articulated languages" are unrealistic, because "torture forces pain to become something like a "transcendental signifier"," and "in order to stay alive, the victim supplies any kind of information, regardless of its accuracy" because "anything is worth stopping the pain (Saez 139). Judith Butler also finds that Scarry's analysis asserts the existence of a "language [that] assists violence, but appears not to wield its own" (Butler 6). She asks, "if certain kinds of violence disable language, how do we account for the specific kind of injury that language itself performs?"

> To argue that the body is equally absent in speech and writing is true only to the extent that neither speech nor writing makes the body immediately present. Although both are bodily acts, it is the mark of the body, as it were, that is read in the written text. Whose body it is can remain permanently unclear. (152)

The alternative production of a language that pain creates is indeed, a "language of pain

[that] could only be a kind of hysteria" in Acker's work, a language that has "all the phonetic excess of hysteria," one "that destroys apparent meaning" (Das 86). The language that can create pain, on the other hand, usually offers a terrifying version of the linguistically apocalyptic sublime. Acker's cartographic "mapping" of pain is an "effective assault on consensus reality (as opposed to the "real") and its production of material suffering," argues David Brande, and it is a project "undertaken on different fronts simultaneously" (199). It can also be considered as a "systemic rather than personal" assault, as Francis Barker asserts, concerning the possible articulation of pain, but this strategy, according to Barker, is one that becomes "formed across the whole surface of the social as the locus of desire, the revenge, the power and the misery of this world" (Barker 22). Yet, "it is precisely the intimacy of that pain, the mark of a violence which is structural to the modern subject and no doubt largely unconscious," that produces the narrative "introjection of the morbid aggressivity which is the shadow" of painful expression, in general, into the interior spaces of the conscious subject (Barker 108-9).

Acker's aestheticization of pain necessitates its theoretical and discursive *application and endurance*, and at many times, it is unclear which is being portrayed because both application and endurance are, in the end, distinguished only by their "intensities" or "*pain waves*," according to Brande (199). He must advance a disseminatory levelling of the individuation of pain in order to assert Acker's project as "the entire masochistic assemblage" which becomes a revolutionary form of "pain-

machine" (204). A body or assemblage, such as the ones that Brande imagines for Acker, can only be "read as an informational text" or as a series of complex relational systems or maps (Stacey 175). But cartographies such as these are not only literary "scripts," and though the pain-machines (texts and bodies) that Acker constructs are reflections of the sublime inner landscapes of postmodern illness and contamination, those "blasted scenes, sumptuous textures, evocative colours, and ET monsters of the immune landscape" that are simply "inside *us*," as Donna Haraway asserts (222), they are also based on flesh and blood bodies that serve as realistic examples of postmodern forms of suffering and illness.

The substance of "martyrdom," as Nadia Tazi describes it, brings together masochism's relationship to a mechanistic systematization of the body "at those crucial moments when anteriority and retrospectivity become confused in one's vision," with the martyr's informational scripts encoded or encrypted into literary moments that "hagiographies are made of" (545). For each one of Acker's martyrs, her desire for resurrection produces a new "informational text." But this resurrection is always a technological process of (de)evolution as well, because the "obliteration" of life through death is successfully *managed* once "the grave of a marvellously restored body exuding the radiance of eternal life becomes an altar" (Tazi 546)

"Some visionary women (such as Julian of Norwich) prayed for a disease as a gift from God," writes Caroline Walker Bynum, but for the average individual of the Medieval age, terminal or painful disease was "a condition to be avoided" (167). A

martyr's masochism was routinely accepted as the "endurance of a condition of illness without supernatural amelioration," and "the catatonic trances and miraculous inedia of living holy women, like the incorrupt bodies they sometimes displayed beyond the grave, could easily be understood as having achieved, in advance, the final incorruption and impassability of the glorified body in heaven" (Bynum Walker 194). Therefore, the proper amount of religious fanaticism, when it was accompanied by a devout measure of masochism, allowed "even the ugliness of disease and suffering" of the martyr to be "lifted up into the curative pangs of purgatory" and "transmuted," according to Bynum Walker. However, the wounds of the martyr's hysterical devotion remained etched upon her, even in her transcendence, as sublime reminders of her suffering, and in a manner that is identical to Acker's translation of masochistic hysteria into a saintly condensation, "stigmatics will still bear their marks before the throne of God, although the wounds will no longer bleed," concludes Bynum Walker. Often, medieval individuals who "manipulated their own bodies for religious goals" more "regularly engaged in modern practices of "self-torture--jumping into ovens or icy ponds, driving knives, nails or nettles into their flesh, whipping or hanging themselves in elaborate pantomimes of Christ's Crucifixion" (163). And therefore, in this regard, the transference of masochistic practices from one age to another subverts radical interpretations of what can be read as newer forms of masochistic delirium and resistance. For example, David Brande's assertion that Acker's re-writing of pain is a potentially revolutionary strategy which ignores its ancestry of martyrdom and hysteria,

as well as the possibility that Acker's portrayals of masochistic agency are really only postmodern revisions of medieval martyrdom without religious faith. Acker's staunch denial of catharsis or resurrection for her martyrs is substituted by her darker version of "suffering as epiphany" or "ecstasy," as "a principle of existence that exceeds human comprehension while demanding human participation" (Schweizer 20). At the points where "the small radius of self" is illuminated, yet trapped within "the vast dimensions of nature" (Schweizer 124), the sublime character of Acker's masochism and martyrdom is textually unveiled.

For Acker, pain is a destructive force, both literally and figuratively; it is "not being cut to the nerve," but "being cut into, right up to, an edge of a nerve" (*Pussy* 104). Her emphasis on a subject's desire to surpass the boundaries of ordinary sensation also illustrates the inability of pain, as a primary facet in this strategy, to overleap the basic, reactive nature of the body. The "revisionary inauguration of epistemology and existential value" that is necessary for the hysterical conversion of the sublime into a "tragic value" may successfully "account for the literary materiality and ideological meaninglessness of suffering (Schweizer 124) as it is experienced and portrayed by Acker. Her *martyred saint-masochist-hysteric* adheres to a hegemonical order of the "saint[s] of repetition," subjects who reduce "everything to the simplest kind of repetition" (Canetti qtd in Acker, "Against Ordinary Language" 25) in their reproduction of a devout aesthetization of pain, as well as their aspiration to believe that death will allow them to transcend the medocrity of existence. For Acker,

however, this is only a compulsive form of "writing" that "will cure you of your suffering" (*Great* 21). The swift and inhumane character of terminal disease that plagues her main characters is narrated coldly and impersonally in a series of accounts which attest to the relatively simple way that people can become "sick with a dread sexual disease," as is the case with Kathy (*Portrait* 87), or, alternately, develop "ovarian infection[s]" that threaten their life, as is true for O (*Great* 54). For Clifford, his girlfriend's terminal illness is only a problem because she can't "give him anything," and "the sicker she becomes," the more he will "have to rip her off," because he is "a feminist" (*Great* 98) who advances yet another objective narration of an Other's illness and suffering.

In "Requiem," Acker's personal struggles with cancer are re-enacted in Electra's various experiences with illness. In Act I, the hospital room where Electra's father is being kept is a site of stasis and terminal anxiety where "nothing ever changes because this territory is located between time and eternity." This setting characterizes the totality of her existence and experiences throughout the opera, defeating any positive readings of the degenerative processes of invasive disease and anxiety. The past, future and present become merged in a successive series of songs that express the despair and fear that have saturated Electra's life:

> It's important to be a little girl
>
> And to lie in your bed,
>
> And all the men lie around you

And all the men are dead. (*Eight Technologies* 272)

Both songs and hospital rooms are representations of spatial and temporal fluidity or fragmentation in "Requiem," and in the limbo of fiction and autobiography, a zone of incurable illness and loss of memory, the "images of stress, illness, [and] disease" (*Pussy* 11) that have typified all of Acker's work, are starkly and intensely depicted. In Act III, Electra and Acker "find out" that they have cancer, "a cancer that had metastasized" (*Digital* 176), and Electra's double mastectomy convinces both author and character that they do not know "what causes cancer." Electra's journey to find out "who did know about cancer" (*Digital* 174-175), replicates Acker's compulsive literary investigation into this question, and finally, both can only think about "killing cancer." If Electra can "kill the cause of " this bigger, sublime idea of cancer, then the "cancer that's in my body will go away," she says (*Digital* 175). The long road of misdiagnosis and hesitancy that speeds the awful beast of death inside her body becomes a narrative of hysterical seizure and masochistic brutality. Electra's breast cancer isn't detected in her medical tests, and instead of being declared "cured," she is told by the "dingdong doctor" that she possesses six other kinds of cancer. "I think I'd know if I was growing every conceivable kind of cancer," she says (176), but the tragic vulnerability of her body is stereotypically conditioned to remain uninformed of even its own inner workings. Acker's mythical ventriloquism of Electra's dilemma asserts her own personal fears and fascination with illness and its cure, by over-and-under-writing the content of "Requiem's" preoccupation with death and suffering. Here, what is "unknown" can

never be fully known by way of journey, treatment, confession, or art. All of Electra's "really bad emotions," those feelings that have caused her psychosomatic predisposition to cancer in the first place, become identified in a medieval medical test where she, the hysterical patient, is forced to hold fourteen vials while being repeatedly hit at the base of her skull with a "tool they use to adjust backs" (*Digital* 176). The reinforcement of masochistic endurance, in this case, reflects a whole range of conditions that provide the *means* as well as the *readings* for a general taxonomy of female suffering and sainthood. This suffering tears "the subject away from her subjugation to herself, the proper" (Acker, *Empire* 12), and in the final destruction of a martyr's wounded body, Acker reveals a number of technological possibilities for metamorphosis that prevent the masochist from committing suicide. Nonetheless, medical tests function for Acker as brutal reminders of the repetitive reality of categorical similarities in all subjective experiences of illness and despair. In this sense, it is unsurprising, then, that the stripper's experience concerning medical diagnosis in *Great Expectations* is nearly identical to Antigone's and O's individual accounts of medical abuse, in *Pussy*. Additionally, Kathy, in *Portrait*, offers yet another identical account of this kind of medical trauma:

> Three hours later I'm now in shock slightly hallucinating doctor gives me four shots of penicillin in ass...gives me endless bottles of synthetic opium and nembutal to shut me up. A month later I'm even sicker. (*Portrait* 82)

For the Stripper, though her disease may be different, the maltreatment she receives is

the same as Kathy's:

> The female had such a bad ovarian infection she'd be screeching with pain if either touched or if one bit of the pain-killing synthetic morphine she was shelling out $100 a week for to kill the pain so she could keep working to pay for the pain-killer wore off. (*Great* 84-5)

In both Antigone and O's descriptions of their medical nightmares, it is inferred that all women must receive the same sadistic attention:

> Antigone: "The doctor moves his tool right inside my skin, then down my leg. It emerges out of the skin below my right cunt lip: there the doctor makes a hole in my inner thigh while I'm watching him. I'm thinking, I don't want what is happening to me to happen, and simultaneously I'm thinking, it doesn't matter what I think." (*Pussy* 171)
>
> O: "They shot liquid--it was either pale yellow or pale orange--into my flesh. I didn't understand why they were doing it. It couldn't be to find out my secrets because I tell everybody everything." (*Pussy* 52-3)

In Acker's work, technology always invades, punctures and penetrates the diseased female body in order to discover the truth of its abnormality. Yet, in its mistaken diagnosis, the medical manifestation of technology categorically reproduces Freudian prejudices upon the woman patient. In Pussy's case, her "uterine insides" are diagnosed as abnormal despite the fact that the "quality of the photos" of her uterus were "poor" (*Pussy* 80). The invasion of medical technology produces women

characters (or subjects in the world) who are hysterically self-reflexive in their suffering, and these bodies that "seem invaded not just by the threatening 'non-selves' that the immune system guards against, but more fundamentally," are also haunted by their "own strange parts" (Haraway 223). "No wonder auto-immune disease carries such awful significance, marked from the first suspicion of its existence in 1901 by Morgenroth and Ehrlich's term *horror auto toxicus*," concludes Haraway.

The causal chain of female trauma that Acker develops in her work follows a hysterical set of propositions to a terminal conclusion. O's realization that she is "no longer safe" translates into a recognition that she is "sick" and hovering near "death" (*Pussy* 21). In fact, hysterical withdrawal and/or defense is present in most modern, clinical situations, writes Michael Taussig, where there is "a contradictory situation in which the patient swings like a pendulum between alienated passivity and alienated self-assertion" (*Nervous* 100).

The direct correspondence between writing as a confessional strategy, and the unavoidable vulnerability of the martyr/author, becomes, for Acker, a restitutive combination that cannot, on the one hand, impede or forestall the progress of death for the character or narrative, yet simultaneously functions as a "mastery of suffering" (Arendt qtd in Acker, *Bodies* 100). Hannah Arendt's concept of "mastery" is directly connected to a recuperative, rather than a revolutionary form of expression, according to Acker:

> Arendt knows that writing, narration, does not end suffering: writing masters

> nothing. Narration, writing does something else. It restores meaning to a world which hardship and suffering have revealed as chaotic and senseless" (*Bodies* 100).

This resurrection of meaning is created via a consistent deconstruction that engages both the inherent cruelty and chaotic potential of mythical re-readings of the postmodern world. The myth of Persephone situates "Requiem" in a transhistorical space of atemporality where the Oracle is substituted with the character of George in order to draw out an ironic and comedic series of allusions and tragic resemblances in a re-negotiation of ancient tales of suffering and sorrow within a postmodern context. The figure of Persephone is recognizable as an archetype that Acker often utilizes; she is both the martyr and artist who is raped, then kidnapped, a figure who substantiates a long history of female abduction and restraint through male dominance. Despite the conditions of her suffering, Persephone creates Dionysus, thereby reclaiming an artistic and generative aesthetic. As is true of Acker's utilization of the classical figures of Electra and Perspehone, they are really not standard versions of "mythical elements" which provide the usual "material" of mythical narrative, but rather, they possess a revised "mythical content" which keeps them "embedded in the immanent dialectic," where they become "expelled" only when "subjectivity itself" is obliterated (Adorno, *Kierkegaard* 57). Nonetheless, the "terrible, the forbidden, [and] the uncanny" that appear once this subjectivity has been deconstructed, are not "overcome in the Dionysian assertion of aesthetic generativity," writes Christopher Fynsk (101). Rather,

these phenomena, as they appear in literature and art such as Acker's, become "more terrible," and "this is why the Dionysian affirmation is tragic and why its affirmation is ecstatic," he concludes. For Electra, Perspehone, Acker, and her characters, *faith= writing*, but only in terms of what has already been, or continues to be, a painful experience of loss. Electra, like Acker, locates the origin of this loss in her childhood recognition of the lack of her mother's love, a revelation that destines her to experience existence as painful and solitary:

> If this world is meaningful, I continued, then so must be each of its parts, no matter how minute. If this world is meaningful, then I need to concern myself, not with cancer, but with its cause. Whatever caused it must change. I know one thing. That writing is a way to change reality. (*Digital* 175)

The Saintly Body: Literary Resurrection And Transcendent Aesthetics

The martyr's hope for resurrection, need for restitution, and final desire for redemptive reconstitution, situate Acker's textual transformation of the ill body into a systematic process that is grounded in the technological sublime. The saintly body, as a result of the dissemination of the martyr's figural form, is a discursive field of ecstatic energy which possesses an innate will-to-transcendence. In the "seizure of revelations lurking on the edge of every moment and behind each phenomenon" (Porush 107), Acker's saintly bodies, those hysterical "Bodies Without Organs" that are the sublime landscapes of virtual and textual amplification, appear. In terms of this final manifestation of the body, Acker's alliance with Nietzsche is evident in her individual

pursuit of a number of postmodern movements that trace a path between suffering and art. For Nietzsche, a "self-ravishment" is necessary for an "uncanny" creativity to develop. This is an artistic mode of existence which promotes and possesses "sublime consequences":

> This secret self-ravishment, this artist's cruelty, this delight in imposing a form upon oneself as a hard, recalcitrant suffering material and in burning a will, critique, a contradiction, a contempt, a No into it, this uncanny, dreadfully joyous labour of a soul voluntarily at odds with itself that makes itself suffer out of joy...eventually ...also brought to light an abundance of strange new beauty and affirmation, and perhaps beauty itself. (*Genealogy* 87-88)

Acker's subjective metamorphosis from autobiographical confessor into sublime author/character, evidently borrows from Nietzsche's transformative aesthetic, and here, suffering becomes a "new beauty and affirmation" of uncanny "joy." However, Acker's technological fascination with the sublime reconstructs the ailing body of the masochist or martyr, which is first, a "sub-machine," into the "super-machine" of ecstatic energy, a form which is nothing more than a "screen image" (Beaune 434). And this super-aesthetic form, or body/machine is a figural vision in Acker's work that necessarily runs up against the "limit of technology" (Beaune 435). Acker's deconstruction of the ill body is identical to an aesthetic project that Marilouise and Arthur Kroker describe as a "substitution by death of a thousand aesthetic cuts" (*The Last Sex* 3), a redesigning of masochistic and hysterical "sub-death" that is advanced once the

overt sterility and hybridity of the martyr produces an indeterminate textual space where "aesthetic cancellation and sacrificial violence" can finally produce the sublime, "bodily architecture of the last sex" (Kroker and Kroker 3). Therefore, Acker's saint is an "aesthetic or more precisely, a *ludic* object," as Beaune also suggests of the super-machine (436), an object/subject that simultaneously *demonstrates* yet *conceals* its "cunning artifice" (436) by accessing images of Medieval saints and postmodern apocalypse. In this way, it is s machine that borrows from a "primal mythology" (Beaune) of iconographic mutation and reference, one that reflects the strange, technological reorganization of the organic body, which, in turn, resonates in Acker's textual mutations or new forms of writing. In any mechanistic evolution of linguistic or material objects, the occurrence of metamorphosis, whether "immanently and pragmatically, by means of a contagion and contamination," or in accordance with "laws neither of resemblance nor of utility" (Ansell Pearson 6), designates all systems and structures as partisan, or "made up of machinic assemblages, complex foldings, and moments of deterritorialization that seem to cut across and derange their stratification" (Ansell Pearson 125). Therefore, transformation, on the whole, is an unpredictable and risky business in literature and reality.

Acker takes the productive body of the masochistic worker made from the modern designs of industrialization and transforms it into a postmodern map of rhizomatic ecstasy, where the deterritorialized intensities and rhythms of this metamorphosis produces patterns of psychological, textual and physical nomadism. As

this body develops its "languages of intensity," or systems of gestural communication which allow a "pure intensity" (Acker, *Bodies* 92), the saint, in her transparent ecstasy, is the final, transitional evolution of the "letters, [and] machines [that once] *invaded an* American garden" (Slade 28). Further, Acker's anxieties concerning threats of contamination and "cybernetic discontinuity" (Slade 29) necessarily create sublime correspondences between the terminal illness of art, literature and human existence.

"Fiction, art, [and] technology wield a big cutter," and when the "world [is] not cut right, let us recut it, [and] make it more beautiful," writes Lyotard (qtd in Benamou 73). Rather than composing simply terminal or aesthetically final movements which seek out "more beauty," work such as Acker's pursues what Michel Benamou calls "*le mobile du crime*" (74) because of its fascination with "the power of the human ego, which is unable to sustain the thought of being in excess in the world." The inability of either character or text to think the unthinkable permits the literary mind of the author to transform "its power from a choice of words into a choice of world" (Benamou 74). Acker's reformulation of fictive and auto-biographical bodies and characters into "survival machines" is equally evident in her construction of "gigantic lumbering robots," who are embodied reflections of the continuation of the literal sublime and grotesque. Alternately, her depiction of tiny, molecular fiends or viruses who aggressively reproduce themselves in agreement with "the viral logic according to which life produces death, and death in turn lives off life" (Shaviro, "Two Lessons" 41), are yet another manifestation of the microcosmic influence of the grotesque. The

tension between Eros and Thanatos in this mad mass of inhuman energy creates transformations in collective ideas of metaphysical existence, providing evidence that Acker's transformative aesthetic has been greatly influenced by the bleak pessimism of William Burroughs:

> And so remember this the next time you gush over a cute infant. "Cry of newborn baby gurgles into death rattle and the crystal skull," Burroughs writes, "THAT IS WHAT YOU GET FOR FUCKING." (qtd in Shaviro 41)

The debris of illicit, aesthetic reproduction in Acker's work threatens to engulf characters such as O, who is "just an orgasming machine" "without brains" (*Great* 52), or a "perfect whore" who is "not human" and "without thoughts," because thinking is only "present in those hiatuses when you're not a machine moving to survive" (*Great* 48). In *Pussy*, O's body is recycled into a "zombie" (10) and a "motorcycle" (48), but she is technically a "dead person who's alive" (*Pussy* 10). This liminality between perverse or marginal zones of existence or non-existence imitates masturbatory rhythms and methods of auto-affective strategies in Acker's literary aims that correlate with what Nell Tenaaf argues is the "mystic's autoeroticism." Under this influence, women in each text are "coming into" themselves (30) yet *going* away from the frustrations of hysteria and the sublime.

Writers "produce real bodies," even if they are "imaginary," asserts Deleuze ("Mediators" 293), and when the "sick" body" becomes an "overheated factory" (qtd in Guattari, *Chaosophy* 75), the ill body of Acker's fabrication is neither a "Body Without

Organs" nor a "dead body," but another kind of form that is "all the more alive" because it "has *blown apart*" the "organism and its organization" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand* 30). The X-ray, imprint or trace impression of the suffering body that this form has illuminated becomes extinguished by the flash of sublime revelation, countered only by the trace impressions of the traditional body of a book's form or genre that are left behind once Acker's explosion of experimental writing has taken place.

Acker's writing of multiplicity, paranoia and "becoming" offers a complexity of voices, figures and themes that testify to the separation of "the erection of a great paranoid bureaucratic machine from the installation of little schizo machines of becoming-dog or becoming-beetle" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand* 34). And any reading of her work is therefore, is a reading of the"limit" of unlimited scope, where the moment the question arises concerning an acceptance or a refusal of either character or text, a recognition of the way that the reader is "already on it, scurrying like a vermin, groping like a blind person, or running like a lunatic" occurs (Deleuze and Guattari 150). All Acker's variations and intensities in setting, theme and narrative follow Deleuze and Guattari's categorical list of bodies that are *becoming-ecstatic* in postmodernity. The "hypochondriac body," the "paranoid body," the "schizo body," the "drugged body," and the "masochist body" (150), can easily include Acker's martyr, saint, hysteric and patient. The disseminatory structures of postmodern texts and bodies such as these, unveil what David Porush calls "the machinery or technology of their

fiction," by cybernetically producing a language that is "a sort of vulnerable machine," "simultaneously rigid and pliable," "like the human body" but different because it is a "soft machine" (19). Each and every abstract, desiring or "soft" machine of text, dream or confession, is therefore "linked to other abstract machines" by "convergent" operations in the totality of the "mechanosphere" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand* 514) of aesthetic re-evaluation. In Acker's work, the "empty" bodies of characters such as Abhor, Airplane, Capitol and Pussy, are deliriously interchangeable with the cancerous or built-bodies of their author and/or her constructs. As a result, the "becoming-cancer" of Acker's body is reproduced into all "becoming-bodies" in her texts, as she repetitively explores the "grand narrative" of the body (Cranny Francis 112-13) through literary collage, impersonation and ventriloquism. Electra, like Acker herself, wants to "kill" the "cancers" inside of her in order to reach a "moment" when "something" else can come out of her ravaged body or deformed text ("Requiem," Act II). When both author and character recognize that "someone larger than" either of them is taking control, a voice comes out of Electra's mouth which says, "No more of this death. You've fucked everything up so now I'm taking over." This male voice inside of Electra, aside from the obvious correlation between author and character, signifies the possibility for a transcendent release of her conscious and immanent suffering into the totality of one "huge being" (Acker, *Digital* 175). But in her reclamation of God, Electra also experiences a final restitution of her most painful *(un)becoming*. Acker's apparent authorial wish-fulfilment allows Electra to be

resurrected or reincarnated, and "grow up in love" with all available, ecstatic possibilities for an aesthetically pleasant existence (*Digital* 180), yet the conclusion of this character's life is as ambiguous as all others that Acker unveils. Electra's final comparison of "breathing," with "praying," may be read as yet another form of uncharacteristically spiritual or religious resurrection, throwing the thematic prevalence of pessimistic faithlessness that characterizes Acker's work into doubt. For Acker and her martyrs, transcendence is always an elusive fantasy or a last-ditch effort to recuperate faith in order to ensure their transcendence or resurrection, but in the final analysis, it is little else. "For to breathe is always to pray," as Electra sings (181).

Chapter IV: Three Principles Beyond Freudian Pleasure And Death

> Desire cannot be theorized; systematized; that truth of desire can neither be seen nor shown. Desire cannot be put on display. Unless, perhaps, in its inscription as a succession of postcards, its textual enactment, its non-systematic, non-theoretical, elliptical, incomplete, uncertain, elusive performance, in a work which mimes desire and mimics fiction, which is inconclusive, apparently inconsequential--a text which is above all and in all kinds of ways neither here nor there. (Catherine Belsey 407)

> I don't know how desire begins. In someone who hasn't known desire in a long time. In soil that is barren. Barrenness out of rape. I'm writing this because I want to see where and how desire begins. Later on, when I would be wanting and not able to have him, Georg said, "Life revolves around desire." I don't remember. Language must begin in desire. "No new world without a new language." (Acker, *My Mother* 224)

The movements of desire in Kathy Acker's work arise out of a foundation of sublime hysteria, with its potential for gestural and radical artistic composition, as well as the transformative influence of the grotesque, and its ability to technologically and psychologically deform the formalism of aesthetics, ideology, literature or art. Acker's three, primary pleasures are both "cruel and creative" in their ability to influence and assert "encounter[s] with alterity, to open to the other, and to draw this otherness in a creative act," writes Christopher Fynsk, and finally, "to draw it out in such a way that the

creative act is an ongoing exposure to that otherness" (101). For Acker,a desire for the perverse, the criminal and the violent "does not negate the other in order to posit itself (immediately)," but instead, "*negates* and posits an other," responding, identically, to Nietzsche's uncanny form of "ressentiment." This is a destructive, yet affirmative nihilism, one which asserts the following logic: "I am ugly, therefore there must be a beautiful" (qtd in Fynsk 92). Acker's radical yet standard utilization of sadomasochism, her positive/negative portrayals of lesbian difference, and her plagiaristic methodologies as both acts of anti-establishment piracy and acknowledgement of others' works, are typically Nietzschean in their contradictory predispositions as both "reactive" (Fynsk 93), and nihilistic. When the "inhibited will" that develops out of these contradictions "turns upon itself," the "caged animal that maltreats itself for want of any external discharge," turns against itself by *turning into* what Nietzsche described as "an adventure, a torture chamber, [and] an uncertain and dangerous wilderness (qtd in Fynsk 91). The three streams of post-Freudian and Nietzschean desire that dynamically dominate the homosexual, sadomasochistic and sublime literary endeavours in Acker's negotiations with principles of sex, pleasure, death and art.

Contrary to my title, there can be no movement "beyond" Freud's pleasure principle because all sexual or instinctual structures and their exchanges are closed or stable systems that incorporate the repetitious compulsions and perverse anxieties of sex in order to produce madness or art, according to him. For Freud, desire gravitates solely around sex, death, and perversion. And in Freud's "economic point of view," the

"topographical and dynamic" element of psychic processes "is automatically regulated by "the pleasure principle"," a regulatory law that provides a "relaxation" from the tension of "an unpleasant state" (Freud, *General* 141). The pleasure principle is ideally regulated and "deduced from [a] principle of constancy" in accordance with "Fechner's principle of the tendency towards stability" (142). But rather than advancing the stability of this orderly principle, Freud's "sketch-map of this developing waterscape" of pleasure, is instead, "a hydraulic topography charted in words by a master of rhetoric" (Belsey 385).

For Acker, the "beyond" of this already conflicted principle is, on the one hand, the sublime or perverse foundation upon which she can depict the apocalyptic nightmare of existence and, on the other hand, a radically subversive channelling of the Freud's libidinal waterworks. When pain and pleasure are pushed towards their economic limits by the repression of the individual, the death instinct takes up residence in the house of her unconscious. Therefore, Acker's three *principles* are a negotiation of Freud's principles of pleasure which often do not supersede his foundational theories concerning desire. However, the way she uses his economic systems in embodied portrayals of aesthetic predispositions and artistic condensations of postmodern hysteria, contradict Freud's emphasis on a civilized "enjoyment of beauty" (*Civilization* 38). Instead, she asserts an order of the sublime and the grotesque which fundamentally rejects the "protection against the menace of suffering" (Freud, *Civilization* 38) that art can offer, "exposing" character and reader to all forms of

suffering and deformation which occur in the post and pre-apocalyptic world.

Acker's first principle borrows from lesbian forms of *intercourse*,[1] reformulating extremely affirmative depictions of alterity into criminal and perverse portrayals of the lesbian as a figure which heralds the *end* of heterosexual conservatism, as well as an outcast from even the most radical forms of sex and desire. Her second principle advances all forms of *piracy* as anti-heroic and radically heterogeneous, and this guides her practices of literary plagiarism, cartography, and prosthetic "cut-up." And finally, Acker's third principle asserts the economic rule of *pornology*, a legislation that is grounded in the correspondences between standard, pornographic representations and obscene, theoretical modes of aesthetic re-representation which present themselves

---

[1]My use of the term of "intercourse" alludes to Freud's theory of the origin of neurosis which found it to be located in early "sexual traumas" or "infantile sexual scenes." Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson describes these as being episodes of "sexual intercourse in childhood" which Freud later referred to as the "seduction theory" (*The Assault On Truth* 3). For Freud, connections between the pleasure principle and the seduction theory proved problematic. His erasure of the seduction theory's wide scope of influence created a more acceptable form of "economic" designation in his later theories concerning desire. In his rejection of the seduction theory, Freud implied that the "seduced" child was also "the seducer," suggesting that any sexual act that occurred was provoked by the child's "own behaviour" (Moussaieff Masson 5). The idea that all children are sexually abused or assaulted without their consent is reiterated by Acker, consistently, throughout her work. The "damaging and lasting effect on the later lives of the children who" suffer the "seductions" (Moussaieff Masson 3) of adults is a familiar and tragic motif in Acker's texts.

without sensual gratification. This redirection of desire results from a disseminatory re-configuration of what is traditionally a static, pornographic body and narrative structure. Because all three of Acker's principles work to unsettle her textual form, characters and readers, her work illustrates how it is that the "goal towards which the pleasure-principle impels us--of becoming happy--is not attainable" (Freud, *Civilization* 39). Acker's pornology engages only the negative aspects of pleasure from Freud's theory, and emphasizes the *unpleasure* of the death drive by sanctioning all forms of taboo or perverse desire. These expressions of negative pleasure provide a map of Acker's stylistic *trademarks* and their *fort/da* activity, a system which operates according to transubstantiation, translation and transference. As a descendant of Freud's "theory-fiction," Acker also employs a form of writing that is primarily "speculative," "impassive," or "loose" (Lyotard qtd in Bennington 49). However, despite the characteristically hesitant or exploratory movements of this desire in her work, Acker's principles of theory and fiction leave open a distinct margin of speculation concerning what Freud established as an economy of desire, as well as the formal constraints of genre and style in traditional discourses of aesthetics and literature.

Beyond The Freudian Beyond: Economies Of Pleasure

In *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*, Freud's undecidability concerning the nature of desire's limitations and consequences successfully contaminates his text. "By the time of *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*--the title is particularly telling in its sense of projection--the idea of the wish or desire itself as a unitary impulse has become

irredeemably problematized," writes David Wills (117). Freud's *Beyond*, as a result, is "less a theory of desire than a theory of the projection of desire, or the desire of projection" (Wills 117). In comparison to *Civilization And Its Discontents* (1929-1930), where the pleasure principle is described as a "forepleasure" that is consequently *unpleasurable*, Freud's "reversals, " in consideration of the principle of pleasure in *Beyond*, create a "space of prosthetic supplement" where, according to Wills, his desire to theoretically "speculate" became replaced with the bulky appendages of "propositions, projections and conjectures" that systematically attempted to define an abstract desire and its movements in the individual psyche. This supplementary speculation attached itself to "a series of differences," creating yet another theoretical text, one which asserts determinacy, yet possesses "a little of the bricolé or ad hoc about it" (Wills 94-5). Freud's subjectivity also leaked its way into his objective writing, and as "a would-be perfect modernist, creating rationality out of primitive chaos," he unwillingly adhered "to his own imperative, *Wo es war, soll ich werden* [Where id was, there ego shall be]" (MacKendrik 6). Freud's subjective tendencies led him astray, argues Karmen MacKendrik "despite himself," and when "the paradoxicality, carnality, and seductive irrationality of the unconscious to which he devotes his work" infiltrated "the conscious and scientific rationality to which he devotes his desire," the subversive character of libido conjoined with the rational stability of a theoretical structure.

The "inherence of the perverse within the normal" (MacKendrik 7) in Freud's writing allowed what is seen as theoretically perverse to appear in the most rigid of his

economies, and therefore, the *foreplaying and replaying* of desire is one that runs "backwards however fast it runs forward," or runs "towards death as fast as it runs to embrace life" (Wills 117), finally allowing the sensuality of the profane to contaminate the integrity of what is sacred. Catherine Belsey's analysis of Freud's "work" and his "writing" asserts that "the scientific clarity" of his text is "an illusion," and at those times when his "writing doubles back on itself, never reaching the promised goal, but offering another in its place," the processes "of displacement and substitution" in his work imitate "the ways of [his] desire," making "of the text itself an object of desire for the reader" (393). In Acker's case, "movements" such as these are always characterized by the doubling of a profane desire in the same way that this desire also plagued Freud and his work. "The subjectivities tenuously posited" in the processes of displacement and substitution in both writers' work became caught "between territorialization and re-territorialization," and as is particularly true for Acker's deconstructive aesthetics, these texts "focalize--in the form of short-term memory that includes forgetting as its process--[on] a surveying or mapping of the social through intertextuality" (Ironstone-Catterall 172).

Wills argues that Freudian theory is a "theory of psychic economy" which can be read spatially, or as an architectural model which relates "a loss or gain of comfort, of room; as a question of accommodation, [or] of what fits in the space provided" (103). This structural edifice allowed Freud to deal "with the monster within" himself (103). Although it seems that Acker may deconstruct Freud's Oedipal determinism, she also

relies upon his "primary instincts--the need for nourishment and love--as the basic drives in the individual," demonstrating, concurrently, "how the primary instincts are deprived of their realization through modifications necessitated by the Reality Principle" (Ironstone-Catterall 171). "In Freudian terms, Acker is attempting to dismantle the Reality Principle and to unleash the drives of the Pleasure Principle," concludes Ironstone-Catterall.

For Freud, a "theory of pleasure" eventually focused upon the "intense, fragmented, fragmenting, and perverse" aspects of Thanatos, cutting "across the psychoanalysis of pleasure at every point to open impossible spaces" (MacKendrik 10), while, at the same time, constructing a "dialectical" aim for that principle. This dialectic posits an "erotic aim of sustaining the entire body as subject-object of pleasure," calling for "the continual refinement of the organism, the intensification of its receptivity, [and] the growth of its sensuousness" (Marcuse 212). The pleasure of discharge in Freud's economy is always intimately connected to Thanatos, and the oscillation between Eros' establishment of "ever greater unities and more cohesive wholes," is also a consistent unravelling of these unities in order to assert the forces of "abolition and death" (Harpham 67). This "paradoxical" pleasure or a "pleasure-in-tension (even to the point of pain)" (MacKendrik 8), is both the "release of tension (which seems improbable)" and the appearance of pleasure as "both tension's release and its increase," concludes MacKendrik. And this negative economy of release allows for the possibility of a radical perversion" or "a diabolical death drive" (MacKendrik 8), as an even more perverse

form of instinctual desire that is "an aggression or a destruction drive" comprised exclusively "of loss" (Derrida 9). In the span of time between *Beyond The Pleasure Principle* (1920), and *Civilization And Its Discontents* (1929-30), Freud's expenditure of "pure-loss" was established as an economy ruled by the death drive, "as if Freud could no longer resist, henceforth, the irreducible and originary perversity of this drive" (Derrida 10). The "transaction "between the death drive and the pleasure principle created yet "another economy," argues Derrida, because "the death drive is not, in itself, a principle," and therefore, "it threatens every other principle it comes into contact with" (12).

Acker's recognition of the oscillatory relationship between death and pleasure is the foundational basis of her explorations of Freudian sex and desire. For Acker's purposes, a man has "two instincts," as Capitol remarks, "*eros* and *death*":

> The natural conjuncture, in the male, of these two drives bends him toward brutality and violence. Sexually and nonsexually. Is there a difference? He asked. A man can try to kill himself, but it's useless to try, for he'll always kill another person.
>
> That's what he was saying before Mother suicided.
>
> I knew I have other instincts. (*In Memoriam* 201)

These instincts are typically male and "daemonic," appearing primarily, in "post traumatic dreams, child's play, the behaviour of patients in the psychoanalytic situation and in the fate of neurosis" (Schur 324). And these daemonic forces are always the

"motivational forces which repeatedly lead to behaviour that results in frustration, unhappiness and often tragedy" in both reality and fiction, argues Schur. Differences that appear in the textual enactment of the combination of Eros and Thanatos are based, in Acker's texts, on standard, Freudian concepts of sex and gender stereotypes. Quentin's desire is instinctually grounded in more primal forms of aggression and frustration, while Capitol's is appropriated under a Freudian "economy" which categorically restricts all feminine abnormality. Perversity is the influential correspondent of this gendered desire for Acker, creating presentations of either subversive or aggressive passion and action. "Perversity is the explosive twist at the heart of the modern theory of desire, that which must eventually render it postmodern," writes MacKendrik. Therefore, Freud's "perverse subject" who exhibits "a weirdly familiar set of traits in its pleasure," is a "fragmented, indirect, multiple, and nonsensically multidirectional" subject (MacKendrik 11) who is also representative of the unrestrained, libidinal energies of Acker's characters. These subjects are further qualified by a postmodern brand of discontent that constructs them as much more intense and apathetic individuals than Freud's modern perverts.

Apathy adopts a number of perverted forms in Acker's work and O's description of the way that her desire travels like a "message" from "the invisible to the visible world," also defines her "anger" as a *messenger* that could "lead to a revolution," but one that is always destined to fail (Acker,"Once Upon" 266). Here, O appears to exemplify what Mackendrik suggests is the "indirect" or "multidirectional" nature of the

Freudian subject, yet O's conflation between the "message" and the "messenger" exhibits her displacement of identity into a transmissive discourse that can only result from a sublime erasure of personal identity. Therefore, O is both an Other and herself, a subject and a radical object, the "failed" message and indifferent messenger of a modern affirmation of perverse modes of pleasure and discourse. The character of Artaud is yet another of these perverted subjects, a self-alienated individual who describes himself as "a limitless series of natural disasters and all of these disasters have been unnaturally repressed" ("Once Upon" 267), emphasizing a postmodern interiorization of the grotesque or the sublime. As a reflection of Acker's recognition that "desire isn't a problem because life revolves around desire," characters such as O and Artaud are displaced from the origins or "the beginnings of desire" in both themselves and their uncanny texts (*My Mother* 228-29). This psychological sublime consistently characterizes many of Acker's main characters, for example, B dismisses desire wholeheartedly, insisting that she must "own" her desire but cannot because "desire's so huge," so she finally resolves this dilemma by "buying it" (*My Mother* 166). Desire functions here as yet another corporate or mercantile American *transaction*, and B's purchase exemplifies the totality of Acker's correlation between "art and business, or capitalism in its finality" (*My Mother* 101). The dysfunctionality of these characters set the stage for the manifestation of an "era of anarchy" or apocalypse and as a result, this zone where "no one had the same language," and cities are filled with "dying and dead bodies as if they were garbage" (101), reflects a basic state of decay in individual

sensitivity. "No material or desires" exist in these spaces, "concludes Acker, except in the realm of death" or numbness.

In the "collision" between the values of modernism and the loss of value in postmodernity, a "dialogic relationship" rather than a "dialectic of transcendence" (Ironstone-Catterall 179), results. The movement of perverse desire in Acker's work, as a series of postmodern transmissions,"correlates with nomadic patterns of mobility, brain processes, and the cartographic nature of intertextual engagements with the social" (Ironstone-Catterall 179), which create the conditions for a dialogic aesthetic to develop. This mode of aesthetic energy is extremely different from a transcendent dialectics which can erase hermeneutical or phenomenological interpretations and engagement. In Keith Ansell Pearson's description of a transcendental aesthetic, he suggests that it is a potentially radical site of construction within the transcendental itself, one that can offer a dialectical reading of the relationship between the immanence of art and the transcendental nature of the aesthetic, providing a strong possibility for "emancipating oneself from one's suffering" (7). Additionally, he argues that within "the task of tracking the 'reality of the creative'" is "an exposition of a variety of transcendent(al) illusions, connected to, for example, nihilism (which is only a sign or symptom of decay and the arrival of the new), to entropy, to the death-drive, to 'evolution' as classically conceived, and to the alleged autonomous theo-logic of capital" (Ansell Pearson 7). This is what he describes as the "transhuman" condition, a transient process that acts as a counterpart to transcendental aesthetics, a state where

one can effectively "think" herself beyond Freud's principles of pleasure. And as an aesthetic and "an amorous game of repetition" (Deleuze,"Repetition" 27), the transhuman, as is true of the postmodern, is also "a theory of *contradiction* and of *struggle*" (Kristeva, *Revolution* 170), that appears in Freud and Acker's work as a theory which emphasizes the perverse repetition of a subject's struggles with death, terminality, or other forms of mortality:

> All that your grandparents and parents, educators and society showed you, the triumphal road, the right way, the path of true virtue--the RIGHT, the GOOD--is only Liberty mutilated and Freedom shredded into scraps of flesh. The raped body. A man's a child who walks down the right road--a street thoroughly carved out and signposted--because all he can see is the word danger. (Acker, *My Mother* 18)

First Principle: Lesbian Intercourse And The End of Sex

An *end of sex* in Acker's work also means an *end* to desire, art, and literature. In the "destruction of community, of urban loneliness, [and the] industrial degradation of nature," "the weakened egos" (Arato 207) that typically inhabit Acker's post-apocalyptic settings revel solely in the perverser pleasures of repetition and violence. The isolation and indifference of both a victim and her abuser in these settings is symbolic of a broader, postmodern apathy and despair, one that is vividly illustrated in the case of Airplane and her lover who are left "alternately cold and desperate" by the end of their brutal affair and the violence of their novel:

> In apartment, naked except for her white man's undershirt over her head. Hit her lightly with belt. Hit head. Hit the corner of eye, knicked the skin there. End of sex. Knew she had been sexually tight because no longer trusted him. (*In Memoriam* 255)

The "polymorphously perverse" utilization of the "pleasure in sexual looking, exhibitionism, and sadistic impulses" (Freeman and Stream 210-211) that Acker adopts as a primary mode of energetic desire, arises out of an "abnormal sexuality." In Freud's thinking, the "unconscious tendency to perversion" which certain individuals exhibit, "without exception," is posited upon an understanding of perversion that Acker also possesses, where the inevitable appearance of "inverted impulses, [and] fixation" of "libido upon persons" of one's "own sex" (Freeman and Stream), substantiates queer desire as the most perverse of all sexual impulses. Yet, as Elizabeth Grosz asserts, perverse energies such as these are the "positive and negative sides of the same coin" because perversions "avoid the repression" that characterizes neuroses yet produce an excess of "unpleasure," therefore allowing a classification of homosexual desire as a primary, negative perversion (143). Freud's discussion of perversity was "most exclusively [conducted] in terms of the "pre": the pre-oedipal, the pre-symbolic, the pre-law, the premature, [and] even the pre-sexual," writes Diana Fuss, one that "routinely" assigned lesbians "to the regressive, conservative space" of a "fictive" psychoanalytic origin or more precisely, to "the origin of *any* female sexual identity" (58, 60). Fuss argues that homosexuality is therefore, "inessential" to psychoanalysis,

and that in a "double sense," it is positioned as "an essential waste ingredient" where "the child's homosexual desire for the parent of the same sex" is "essential to the subject's formation as sexed," yet "is nonetheless simultaneously figured as nonessential, [or] a dispensable component of desire that ultimately must be repudiated and repressed" (Fuss 60). The impulse towards "being like," in Jessica Benjamin's analysis, is the means wherein a child acknowledges the "subjectivity of another person" and the "element of pleasure in an other is gained" only through this desire for likeness (106). And further, the deterministic origins of "feminine development" in Freudian theory suggest that "the little girl starts out originally as a "little man," who actively, rather than passively, loves her mother (Benjamin 87), rather than her father.

For Airplane, both these psychoanalytical models become experientially verified. In the following description she offers a narrative of her sexual development that literally reiterates Freudian theory:

> Around that time I decided I wanted to be a boy. I found a cheap barber, there were lots of cheap barbers in Connecticut.
>
> It's not that I wanted a penis. I've never sympathized with Freud when he said that. Freud didn't understand the relations between sex and power. Looking like a boy took away some of my fear...If I were a lesbian, I would have control over my life, my vulnerability, the thing between my legs, my need to be touched though not my need to touch (I had that anyway), all of my childhood which remained, all which should be allowed. If I had control over my

> vulnerability, I couldn't be hurt as profoundly as I was being. Sexuality must be closely tied to reality because by being a lesbian, I could make the reality I wanted. Not drugged up in a bed or in a sex show. (*In Memoriam* 143)

Acker's lesbian characters are typically young and bisexual girls who are attending Catholic girls' school.[2] However, O's experiences at summer camp are yet another version of educational segregation where sex and sexuality are homosexually oriented ("Once Upon" 268), while Laure's "Diaries" of her lesbian escapades in *Portrait* are grounded in another kind of juvenile environment where experimentalism and transgression allow same-sex liaisons. Kathy and Jean's relationship in the girls' school (*Portrait* 36-40), as well as the "Dykes" in prison (173-184), or, finally, what Pussy describes as the "female school of piracy" in *Pussy*, are standard, institutional examples of perversely adolescent shifts into abnormal sexual preferences. The early, and usually mistaken transgressions of these characters appear to promote Acker's preference for an "androgynous" kind of radicality, one where a subject isn't "gay" or "straight," but only "very loose" (Acker qtd in "Interview," *Hannibal* 1).[3] This autobiographical propensity

---

[2]In *Identification Papers*, Diana Fuss suggests Freud's theories of lesbianism are situated in his concept of "group hysteria," one which emphasizes the segregational aspects of same sex institutionalization and its direct correlation to an increased frequency of lesbian and gay relations and behaviours in these sites (60).

[3]This sexual ideology can be seen in light of Elizabeth Grosz's comments regarding the future of queer pleasure. She argues that "anti-intellectualism or a naive return to the 1960's style polysexualism, which sought pleasure with no responsibility, and which moreover, lived out only men's fantasies of sexual freedom while subsuming

originates from Acker's relationship with Peter Gordon, where she was free to experiment with other partners, usually female, and in one particular instance, she acquired "a girlfriend" named "Vanessa" who was ideally suited to Acker's bisexual tendencies and/or heterosexual needs because she never threatened the continuation of either of Acker's "loose" lifestyles:

> Vanessa was this beautiful, beautiful black girl and she would come in and whop Peter around. She would say, I'm gonna fuck your girlfriend now and Peter would just giggle. He didn't know what else to do. Ah, Vanessa was something. I was writing but I didn't want to make a thing about it. It was as if I had two lives. (*Hannibal* 1-2)

Vanessa, like Peter, provides Acker with the freedom and the fluidity that she desires in both her sexual and her literary enterprises. Acker's theories concerning bisexuality can be read as either a positive evaluation of an ambiguous, deconstructive fluidity or, alternately, as a schizophrenic deformation of an individual's desire that causes her to resemble a grotesque Other, or as she describes it, a "cat who's been given two opposite commands [but] can't act because she's trying to grow a second head" (*In*

---

women's under their imperatives," as is the case with Acker I would argue, is never an option for the pursuit of a broader and more purposeful acceptance and investigation of "sexed bodies," in general, or "queer desire," in particular (*Space* 227). Additionally, Acker's autobiographical remarks about her sex trade work are *cleaner* versions of the abuse that her women characters and real women in the world suffer in terms of their involvement with degradation of prostitution, stripping, and other sex-trade professions.

Memoriam 112).[4] In *Portrait*, Sophie Dawes affirms the thrill of sadistic power when she adapts a bisexual freedom, but even this form of power is unsatisfactory for her. "I want both men and women to love me," she says, yet, "I don't have enough control" (*Portrait* 14). This contradiction in Dawes' awareness originates from the way that "the

---

[4] In *Portrait*, Kathy "starts again" as a lesbian in a girls' school (30), by initially asserting that she is "two people" who are making love to one another (29). She says,

> The big toe of my left foot is making love to the toe of my right foot. The toes become two people. In my head I'm telling someone about the two voices become voices outside my head I almost hear, not quite, I feel I'm closest to people in loony bins I see myself acting superior I'm going to get a job emptying toilets in a loony bin because I subconsciously know that I'm crazy. This is how I'm sneakily helping myself: I ask L about B's work say I think B's work is important because I'm still secretly and madly in love with B; secret sexual intentions determine my actions. The black water and black sky become menacing, I see them as menacing because I'm becoming used enough to them; I'm projecting. A semicircle of people stand around Jean's cubicle, stare at our forms through the thin white curtains. Everyone knows about me. I love you. (Acker 33-34)

Aside from this citation's direct correlation to the "two-headed" cat and it inherent schizophrenia, it also alludes to the menacing "black water" and sky of the natural sublime. Kathy's "projection" of herself appears to perpetuate a recognition of her identity as a grotesque pervert, a fact that is established once a group of onlookers stare at both her and Jean's bodies as if they were extremely abnormal. Additionally, the hysterical defensiveness necessary for a rejection of this ostracism is presented when Kathy says, "The fuck with this shit I'm going to be as direct with you as possible" (*Portrait* 34).

women look down on" her because she is suspected of being a lesbian-Other, and also "they sense I once worked in a whorehouse, [and I'm not married," she exclaims. The sexual division between straight and gay is also a deeper perversity for Dawes, and her impulses oscillate between love and hate, violence and tenderness, and psychosis and sanity, and therefore, she proclaims:"I'm not a robot, I want to love them, I want to walk into a room watch them flock to me so I can kick their shit up their assholes" (*Portrait* 14). When any straight, young woman's bisexual desire nears the border of queerness, it immediately becomes resolved in Acker's texts.

The ideal, heterosexual husband, for example, becomes conveniently metamorphosed into a slender, tall woman "dressed in white furs" with "pink-tan skin" which "gleams" through his/her silk dress (*Portrait* 112), and this is "Peter" who then needs to be "protected" by Kathy, who plays at being "the stronger [or] the man" (*Portrait* 116). Acker's playfulness with sex and gender roles in this passage employs a cross-dressed or reverse-order solution to the problem of ambiguous desire in order to disseminate the tension between straight or gay identification or desire, as well as to offer yet another alternative form of perversity for the heterosexually radical. In part, Acker's motives seem to attempt to entertain the straight woman by transforming the "objects" of her desire, rather than her desire in itself. In "The Language Of The Body," the unidentified narrator is married when she is "very young" and does "not know" her husband (Acker 399), and this basis of anonymity and ambiguity sets the context for the evil transition between her husband's initial role as the "new husband"

(400) into the perverse and "evil ones" (*Penguin* 402). The schizophrenic delineation between the wife's heterosexual need for certainty or stability, and her homosexual tendencies in this story, creates a delineation between her unconscious wish and her conscious awareness which ruptures the illusory happiness of her straight marriage. And the condensation of this rupture is then reflected in the criminal desire and violence of her husband's darker, more perverse, sexual needs, as well as her identification with his victim's corpse who she believes is "a girl" identical to herself (*Penguin* 403). Again, the persistent return of the repressed subject to the "rejection" that "lies beneath the paranoid homosexuality [that is] laid bare by the signifying production" of abnormal desire, produces, at least in the case of Acker's bride, a total loss of normality in "the schizoid moment of scission" (Kristeva, *Revolution* 156).[5] In

---

[5] Valerie Traub, in "The Ambiguities Of "Lesbian" Viewing Pleasure," argues that Kristeva, like Freud, fails to describe an experience of "lesbian sexuality" because her "logic remains caught" in the "trap" of binary thinking. She writes the following:

> "lesbian" can only be thought of as opposition (to women, to heterosexuality) or similarity ("as a man"). Throughout, Kristeva's rhetorical strategy reproduces Freud's; she invokes "lesbian" only to assert its status as "masculine" imposture: the "difference" existing within women's desires is, perversely, male. (Traub, *Bodyguards* 307)

Instead, Traub asks, "What is a lesbian? [And] What is lesbian desire?" The "problematic ontological status of the subject position and its desire," suggests that the term lesbian is "better used as an adjective," than "a noun" that signifies "a discrete order of being" (324). Instead, the idea of the lesbian must be radically altered:

> Neither inhering essentially within subjects nor forcibly imposed upon them,

Acker's *homo-writing*, this rejection and scission, as Kristeva describes it, is actualized in the "interjections" or "semiotic devices" which represent the "nonsublimated, non-symbolized anality" of characters who are dominated by this rejection. Therefore, this kind of writing produces "breaks" in the "linearity of the signifying chain," and creates "paragrams and glossolalia" as "rhythmic expectorations" (Kristeva 152), characteristics that are easily identifiable in Acker's writing. One of the most interesting examples of a

---

> "lesbian" is a point of reference around which erotic "difference" can and must rally politically, but upon which it should never stand for long. Rather that affirm "lesbian" desire...I propose instead the more laborious process of exploring the contradictions inherent in the "lesbian's" construction; for it is the convergences, intensifications, slippages, and displacements between gender and eroticism that make possible a vision of a non-binary mode of erotic pleasure--for all erotic subjects. (Traub 324)

Perhaps Acker's literary experiments with different discursive forms of desire could be seen as a revolutionary re-evaluation of eroticism in the manner that Traub describes. But Acker's *invisible* lesbian characters who are short-lived and stereotypically formulaic, are never a "point of reference" for all erotic "difference," as Traub proposes they must be. Her literature could be read as potentially lesbian-friendly, on the one hand, because of its "convergences, intensifications, slippages, and displacements between gender and eroticism" (Traub 324), a position that echoes Walsh's assertions concerning the non-presence of the lesbian in Acker's work. But on the other hand, I would argue that it actually does very little to advance the emancipation of the lesbian as a perverse subject who is negatively qualified in social or psychoanalytical heterosexism. I think these two contradictory elements are fascinating in terms of inconsistencies in the relationship between author and text, but I wouldn't argue that Acker's work advances Traub's ideals for a queer, female desire.

hetero-repetition to occur in Acker's novels is the series of dream sequences in "I Dreamt I Was A Nymphomaniac Imagining" (*Portrait*). The first narrated dream opens with an endorsement of the application of a middle-class work ethic to sexual performance, and as a result, the nymphomaniac is convinced that she must "learn what is the best love-sex possible" (*Portrait* 101) by repetitively engaging in numerous Harlequinesque forms of intercourse. The second dream, however, begins with a proclamation for all the repetitions that follow: "This dream's repulsively hetero" (*Portrait* 103, 105, 107, 109). Paradoxically, the monotony of Acker's replication of this heterosexual narrative can be read as an incentive, within the text, for the queer subject to assert herself in order to discontinue the boredom of heterosexual fantasy, as well as an overt critique of the heterosexual conditioning of all subjects' predispositions towards queer or perverse desires.

But solely in consideration of its literary application, Judith Roof argues that homosexuality, "of all the perversions,"is the one that becomes "narratively useful, [or] necessary to stir up the middle, to sustain consumptive desire,[and] to make us believe that the hetero no longer holds sway while it holds more and more frequent sway in the commodity narrative" (39). For Roof,

> The sexual anxiety of the heteronarrative is thus located in the outer/inner split, the discursive position of sexuality in culture where sexuality has become an inner truth...Narrative is, therefore, not about literal homosexuality; rather, homosexuality as a fleeting narrative suggestion embodies the nature of

> narrative's (authorized) instability. Homosexuality already constitutes a part of the narrative system as the metaphorical model for the risky *sameness* that operates as the "difference" to a metaphorically heterosexual difference; this allows narrative to replay its recovery constantly. (Roof 81-2)

Acker's frequent use of "masks and costumes" as tools of disguise successfully veil the presence of the death-drive in the repetition of a hetero-narrative, yet they also reinforces the strength of homoerotic difference or disturbance in such narratives. This is a dynamic that originates in the basic tension of the "pleasure principle" itself. "For Freud," writes Fuss, "the story of homosexual desire is always a displaced form of heterosexuality" (Fuss 12), and as Roof comments, "homosexuality does function as narrative's secret whose revelation enables narrative's productive realignment" (Roof 85). Therefore, Acker's transsexual transvestism must function to playfully disguise, yet point towards, the "secret" of homosexual undecidability, both in the narrative and its characters.

However, in Acker's doubling of subject and Other, she foregrounds the tension between the extreme poles of queer and straight desire. For example, when Pussy is a child, another girl, who "wasn't recognizable as male or female" moves into her house and demands to spend all her time with Pussy (*Pussy* 131-32). Pussy realizes she wants "to be with this girl, whom she still didn't know," a girl "she called...Heathcliff" (133). But the anonymous and fervent kind of lesbian attention that Pussy receives from this girl begins to "weaken" her "to such an extent," says her father, "that there was nothing

I could do for her myself. She had begun to smell" (134). The secret identity and sexual nature of this girl/boy offers the conditions wherein Pussy's homosexual propensities are necessarily *straightened out*, and through a process of normalization, one which fails, Pussy transfers this youthful, gay impulse into her criminal pursuits with a group of lesbians pirates. When her father calls for all men to "behead all the unnatural girls" who "placed their hands inside each other's cunts and drew them out, muddied and bloodied," and "put these fingers into their own mouths" (*Pussy* 135-36), the distinction between what is normal and that which is grotesque, in terms of female sexuality itself, is clarified by his attempt to exterminate any threatening lesbians from his heterosexual novel. The polymorphously perverse structures which complicate Acker's narratives of childhood, like the father's call, are scary stories of "sleeping over with best friends, [and] fantasies" of "schoolgirl antics" that are "cloyingly repellent" in terms of defining lesbians as monsters. Jackie Stacey describes these characterizations as bestial and sublime descriptions:

> Lesbians cannot be real women, but neither are they innocent girls. On the other hand, lesbians are seen only in terms of sex. They never stop having sex. They are predatory and desire every woman they come into contact with. They are after your wife, your girlfriend and your daughter. They are like men; and we all know what they are like. Lesbianism is thus constructed both as asexual girls' play and as testosterone-crazed insatiability. Each unnatural in its own way; both refusals of natural femininity. (74)

It is not surprising, then, that Ostracism's feelings towards Pussy, or lesbianism in general, prevent her from being happy as either a queer subject or a straight woman. Her schizophrenic separation of friend from foe, as is evident in her evaluation of Pussy, is predicated upon an internal fear of lesbianism as a solipsistically isolated and sadistically cruel way of life:

> Part of me regarded my friend as if she were a monster. This part of me was a girl whose name was Ostracism, because the closer she got to anyone, the more fiercely, the more insanely, she had to run in the opposite direction. The other part thought that Pussycat was the most beautiful girl she had ever seen. (*Pussy* 121).

In "Two Girls," Acker's monstrous twins, Verax and Skunk, offer a dual multiplication of disgusting and perverse forms of lesbian transgression. Both these girls defecate into basins of holy-water and urinate into the ciboria in a church, using communion napkins to wipe themselves, but these monstrous antics are brief because "soon Verax will be forced to return to her normal life, where every hour is joy and hatred" (*My Mother* 40). At this point, all their profane impulses and queer desires will be de-criminalized and ideally, "there will be no more boredom" once their heterosexual and religious normalization has been successfully completed.

> Richard Walsh argues that Acker's depiction of unconventional sexual relations is one that seeks out "a series of alternatives" along plot lines of "sexual inversion and sadomasochistic experimentation" in order to assert a number of

confusion, sexual deviancy, [and] lesbianism." But these alternatives are "all ultimately failures," he finds, because "their attacks on the power structure of sexual relations are misdirected, working not to rectify this structure but to avoid, ignore or invert it" (Walsh 149). Typically, in Acker's girls' school, the girls may spend their nights sleeping together, but there is "no difference between sex and no sex" (*My Mother* 42) to moderate this homosexual scenario. Desire such as this is reduced by a negative or auto-affective evaluation, on Acker's part. And for straight or bisexual girls in these schools, their lesbian liaisons are effortlessly overwritten by "boyfriends or superstars they were in love with" (*My Mother* 43), effectively excluding their perverse desire and preference for the straight girls who sleep with them. For these gay bunk-mates, those girls who can't *straighten out*, they become *unlucky enough* to *really* be queer. And as a result, they are "passed by" when the heterosexual debutantes "come out" "finished as girls" (*My Mother* 43), and become, in the end, hysterically unhappy. "The more that the word rejection, the word that follows lesbian, appeared, the more I fixated on it," (199) says the queer girl who slips into a crack in an "Oxford-like building." She finds that "in this new space, everything was beautiful" (*My Mother* 205), but this space is not a textual space, but more a liminal zone of non-existence for the lesbian within the margins of Acker's narrative. And so it is that a lesbian's situation in Acker's adolescent narratives is either tragically and fatally hysterical, because of her necessary, autistic withdrawal, or radically alternative, because of her obvious heterogeneity, but it is always viewed as negative and perverse. The *real* lesbian must be clever enough to slip

through the cracks of Acker's totalitarian text and inhabit another world in order to survive both lesbianism and hysteria. The frequent number of references that Acker makes to masturbatory celibacy in these teenage stories is another indication of her authorial "finishing up" of lesbian characters by only allowing them to "come" rather than "come out."

The *end of sex, in the end,* is always preceded by a recognition of the impossibility of sexual pleasure between two women in Acker's novels. In "The Language Of The Body," the young bride recoils from her homosexual impulses, yelling, "I don't want sexuality!" and "I don't want to become diseased" (*Penguin* 407). This rupture in her normality provokes her journey to "find the language of the body" through obsessive acts of masturbation which she cryptically records in her three day "Masturbation Journal." On the first day, what was previously her unlocated "opening" becomes "music" once it orgasmically "go[es] over" (408). On Day 2, the "messages" that enter her at all "levels of the body" re-create her "inside" as "outside" because of "actual touching" (408-9). And on Day 3, the tragedy that occurs is also a transcendence, and when pleasure fails it allows her to experience "relaxing" and "crossing the threshold," permitting her to enter "into music" and discover there is "no body left to become desire." "At this point *failure*" finally occurs and "the whole world turns into something else" (*Penguin* 409). This "something else" of failure is also a new possibility for pleasure in terms of lesbian polygamy, yet this too presents problems. In Acker's novels women always seek out a "refuge in lesbianism" but find that it "is

unsatisfactory because [their] lesbianism is not a fulfilment of desire but an avoidance of it, as [they are] not attracted to [other] women" (Walsh 149), but only to the oddness of their own desire. Therefore, the first principle of Acker's desirous writing as a perverse form of lesbian "inter-course," is, in fact, a *seemingly queer yet not queer principle* which is constituted by indifference, rejection, repetition, and disguise, a textual and psychological desire that characterizes lesbian passion and interaction as a *dead end*, or more appropriately, as a "counterpleasure" (MacKendrik).

Second Principle: The Pirate

> When she was commenting on the work of other writers she assumed, incorrectly of course, that they wrote as she did: with a complete introjection of and identification with the subject of their writings. And, ironically enough, it was this problem and not the other ostensibly more dangerous symptom that undid our work together. Her use of quotation, allusion, citation was so pronounced that I began to see her voice as a camouflage: so thoroughly did her own word work "blend in" with the words of others that it was sometimes impossible, at the level of pronouns and syntax, to decipher where her voice began and the other's ended. (Phelan 133)

Peggy Phelan's description of the scriptural economy of a writer's repetitive hysteria highlights what I see as Acker's perverse strategies of composition in regards to plagiarism, piracy, cartography, and prosthetic insertion or invasion. Her second principle of proto-Freudian pleasure is first, a literary production of (un)pleasure where

"simply taking text to be the same as the world, to be equal to non-text, in fact to be more real than non-text," an impulse which compels her to "start *representing* text" by using the texts of others (Acker, *Hannibal* 13). The "playfulness" of her plagiaristic techniques are similar to the way that a child "play[s] with building blocks" (*Hannibal* 16). For Acker, this process allows a series of loosely interrelated narratives to "introduce multiple subnarratives" because of each text's new "freedom of extreme discontinuity" (Walsh 152-3). The "plurality of textual articulations" that result from this deconstructive plagiarism effectively "subvert[s] any monolithic narrational identity," concludes Walsh, and is, in itself, a foundational element of *écriture feminine*, a compositional desire that is always "quite self-conscious" in her work (153). In contrast to Penelope Ironstone-Catterall's analysis in which she finds Acker's plagiarism to be an exploration and interrogation of the "social problems that are pervasive in Western society" (170-71), Walsh asserts that Acker's plagiaristic methods can never be "polemical" but are always "expressive" (153), forwarding, instead, a "highly subjective revisionary process" rather than a "mechanical principle" of critique (Walsh 154).

Marie-Hélène Huet's basic description of plagiarism as the primary model for a monstrous form of procreation finds that the plagiarist blurs "the difference between the original and the counterfeit," the "creation of literary veils" constitutes the plagiarist's art (187). Huet suggests that these veils effectively "shroud" the "secret of life, [which is] the mother's body," and the absence of any positive father figures in Acker's work, as well as her sublime fascination with maternally grotesque bodies,

operate in order to obscure the distinctions between her's and her work's matrilineal origins. However, in Burroughs' case, plagiarism provided him with "access" to processes of "metamorphosis and collaboration," and these afforded a number of "pleasures of taking off on another writer's "shining" words, [and] escaping one's own habits and obsessions" (Lyndenberg 421). As a result, the "authorial self," for both Burroughs and Acker, becomes "presented as a plurality of selves," that appear as "personae seeking rather than signifying identity," or as "orchestrators of the disruptions" in their texts (Walsh 157).

Acker's plagiarism often alludes to literal and mythical ideas of piracy, and in the case of what could be called a poorer literary composition, Acker, like Pussy doesn't worry that "she's a lousy writer," because "when the pirates translate her stuff they'll make it terrific" (*Pussy* 112). Historically, piracy offered a way out of prostitution and poverty for women who were orphaned or abandoned, or, alternately, as sanctuary for cross-dressers or lesbians. Women who cross-dressed in seventeenth-century England were not as unusual as one might think, and "there were plenty of reasons to attempt such a switch" because well into the eighteenth century women continued to be either married off by their fathers or sold into sexual or domestic service (Klausman, Meinzerin and Kuhn 201). Both Mary Read and Ann Bonny, for example, were raised as boys at the end of the seventeenth century in England (Klausman, Meinzerin and Kuhn). In order to become a pirate, female characters in *Pussy, My Mother*, and *Empire* must disguise their sex, much in the same way that their great-grandmothers did.

Capitol stows away on a pirate ship as a young male because, as is true for women in a male-dominated society, it "would be easier" if she "were a boy" (*In Memoriam* 202). Women who were "too young, or too strong, to qualify for poor relief " could not sign on as sailors or soldiers" and therefore," could only turn to prostitution (204). The material conditions that promoted piracy as a transgressive alternative in the past remain identical in Acker's estimation, but cross-dressing is often pushed to the extreme in her texts because gender hybridity necessarily correlates with the material grotesque. Additionally, this correspondence between disparate forms is due, largely, to the influences of the technological sublime, and the frequent disguising or deformation of sex or gender roles is a subtler form of art than the overt, physical metamorphoses of women pirates and their bodies in *Pussy* or *My Mother*, for example.

"Pirates" were "anarchists and nihilists," and piracy was "a form of life" that possessed "its own conditions, its own rules and ways of thought" (Klausman, Meinzerin and Kuhn 227). Usually criminals without religious, political, social obligations or beliefs, the pirate, as a standard archetype, precedes Deleuze and Guattari's postmodern theories concerning subjects who become "molecular (as opposed to molar)" subjects, and Acker's portrayal of women pirates emphasizes this dissemination of their nomadic subject "as a fundamental principle of pirate life" (Klausman, Meinzerin and Kuhn 230). As the origin of the rhizomatic, the molecular and the nomadic, "in the origins of piracy we see nothing at work other than the unbound desire for singularity and independence" without "the least concern for abstract and

thus empty and completely used-up bourgeois ideals of "individualism" and "freedom" (Kuhn 231). These characteristics are inalienable factors of radical heterogeneity, for Acker, and in *Pussy*, the "Pirate's Rules" are as chaotic and nonsensical as the complex energies and behaviours of the pirate:

> 1. Regarding Purpose: To find a place out of which we come...
>
> 2. Regarding The Identity of All Those Who Undertake the Acts or Infiltrations of Piracy: Half-human half-beast...
>
> 3. Regarding Identity: There are no pirates anymore...
>
> 4. On Pirate Methods and Methodologies: Crooked...
>
> 5. The Purpose of Pirating: Stealing...
>
> 6. Where Pirates Live Free Of Authority: Caves...
>
> 7. Regarding Pirate Purpose: To find buried treasure...
>
> 8. Regarding Direction of Sailing: Buried treasure is hidden in caves at the centers of labyrinths. (Acker 204-6)

These rules reinforce a number of historically verifiable and marginal, psychological and social perversions and transgressions in postmodernity. And further, the accepted idea of the figure and demeanour of the pirate indoctrinates newer orders of criminal and/or perverse pleasure into texts such as *Pussy*, which presents an exclusively female version of the usually male adventures of a swashbuckler. When Dutch pirates invade the country in *Pussy* and "set up their world of shacks," their "outlaw city" is composed of "dens in which the body moved from disease to disease" or "dens of iniquity of all

sorts of vices or longings for the ways of the low, [and] longings for deliriums" (97). This environment breeds the preconditions for delirious contamination, infection and alterity. Pirates, like viruses, are playful and dangerous Others:

> Their rotten souls burn in their bowels. They go only for pleasure. For them alone, you see, naked bodies dance. Unseizable, soft, ethereal, shadowy: the gush of cunts in action. Running free. With a thousand silken fingers, the hands caress the pirates' cocks, maddened by sharp fingernails, red clouds, hurt then cradle, in the darkness of the holds. Sing lullabies mixed with passions' irrational moans, sing of the nipples' erect buds. (*My Mother* 109)

Both the "irrational passions" and "gushing" pleasures advanced by these pirates provide the impetus for "Bits From The Diary I Wrote In Germany [When] I Was Just Copying Porn Novels" (*My Mother*). In this short piece of writing, Acker transforms a recognition of the sublime mystery of profane desire into a revelation of its inherently outlaw or taboo nature. The pirate's dream of "cocks sticking up their heads" transmutes into one where "the heads opened, [and] the clocks came out," and finally, the parts of her pirate's desire that are "unsayable" are recognized to be a "part" of her "because it does something unsayable" to her when it "comes out" (*My Mother* 218). This incomprehensible desire is one that causes her to roam the countryside surrounding Berlin, "torn apart" from the world and her own consciousness. "I will have cocks everywhere, populating my desolate countryside," she says (*My Mother* 219), and this overabundance of phallic supplements to satiate this female pirate's

pleasure suggests that she can, indeed, overcompensate for her castration complex.

All pirates and nomads effectively "map the wild terrain of the soul" (Ingebretsen 200), charting "the unceasing, relentless and dis-centering swirl of background," where "sights, lights, and sound, [or] words" are "used in the service of lies" (Ingebretsen 213). And these cartographic surfaces are sensitive to the flux of rhizomatic movements in deconstructive analyses or literary texts. These movements are characteristically known by their attentiveness to "the slippage of a life of surfaces," and as such, they reflect the "style, bewitchment, a-musement, [and] a-mazement" that is representative of a pirate's subjectivity or identity.

Early versions of pirate maps in Acker's novels are often found in a female child's determination of her primary drives or instincts, and these kinds of sexual charts map out the "fundamental erotogenic zones" of her "sexual geography" (Blum 68). For Acker, a child's unsatisfactory relations with her mother qualify this original caregiver as her "first seducer" (Blum), as well. In *Pussy*, a "pirate brat" typically seeks out "real pirate treasure in the dirty recesses of being" (*In Memoriam* 6), then loots her dead mother's body in order to obtain the "treasure map" and "box" of jewels she needs in order to reach maturation. When O's mother dies, her genitalia is "opened" up like a "jewel case" (*Pussy* 4), and it is found to be a box that consists "of one journey into nonexistence" (37), and "one tray" with "red velvet insides" (4). Finally, when Ange "feels up" O's dead mother in order to find "the key to the box that contains treasure," she realizes that treasure such as this necessarily remains hidden in mothers' vaginas

(*Pussy* 62-3). The "mother's box," for all these pirates, is both "an object, which was as yet imaginary" (64), as well as a map that can never be acquired or deciphered. This unavailability occurs because the mother's genetic map is contaminated by discursive forms of qualification such as psychoanalysis. Therefore, "that map might have come from your mother's body, but it's dead men's talk," says Silver (*Pussy* 233).

For Acker, the difference of grotesque pirates and their bodies offers a prosthetic foundation for other supplementary operations in metaphorical and metonymical production. "Prosthesis," in general, "necessarily refers to two contradictory yet complementary operations: amputation and addition" (Wills 133), and these typically appear as a "discourse on the body" that "demonstrates the extent of its difference" (139). The prosthetic announces itself in the manner of a detail of one's "private life," argues Wills, and therefore, it is like a "surprise box," or a "*boîtier* called prosthetic," that is identical to a pirate's wooden leg which outlived him (284). Further, prosthetic writing, much in the same way, is a radically attentive, yet brutal supplementation of any body (literal or figural) that it affects:

> There is no body that is not also an articulation, and no articulation that does not imply a radical notion of divisibility. In writing prothesis, one enunciates first of all such ideas of articulation and divisibility, and, conversely, a drift along the process of adjunction, a prosthetic chain, indiscriminately contagi[ous] and promisc[uous]. It is therefore the figure of a chiasmus, that between body and word--or indeed a chasm, that into which the words of prosthesis fall locked in a

> corporal embrace--that structures or at least regulates the words that follow, marking the time of the prosthetic condition. (Wills 141)

All the perverse pleasures of piracy, lesbianism, and plagiarism that Acker's work consistently advances are, in total, "constitutionally perverse" (White 265). Her overt references to only those "errant, wandering" desires which are "so inflated with erotic significance" that they must impose "a ritualized pattern of behaviour as the epitome of desirability itself," perversely inscribe the polymorphously perverse subjects that perform within her desirous writing. These are subjects who become tragically possessed with only "prosthetic memories" or "implanted memories," fictional victims of narratives that effectively "construct" their identities for them (Landsberg 177). Additionally, the monstrous inner workings of this perverse desire becomes an "unavoidable [prosthetic] part" of a writing, that in the end, evokes a of the deformity of aesthetic beauty, as it is a "beauty [that] will be CONVULSIVE or it will not be at all" (*My Mother* 211). The substance and appearance of reality is altered by the influence of this desire, and in her old neighbourhood, "where the air doesn't change color," Kathy routinely walks "into parts of dead human bodies, in some cases, a leftover oyster, used and unused condoms" and "small piles of bras [that] covered over the limbs of those who were dying." "This I have seen," she says (Acker, *My Mother* 211), transferring her stark visual taxonomy into the reader's grasp in order to hasten a recognition of the broader manifestation of the sublime and the grotesque. This routinely occurs, I would argue, as if by way of an aesthetic osmosis.

Freud's experience of prosthetic addition, by comparison, was far more personal and painful than Acker's aesthetic forms, yet was just as influential in terms of his work. Freud's mouth cancer and the radical surgical amputation of his upper palate necessitated a prosthetic mouthpiece that was a kind of machine or a "huge" physical implement which "shut off [his] mouth from the nasal cavity." It was described by Ernst Jones as a "horror" or "the monster" (qtd in Wills 92), and from the first moment that this "armature [was] put in place" in Freud's body, it entered into his "works of 1919-1929," argues Wills, as "something precisely of the monster [that] became an unavoidable part of Freud's body and existence" (93).

Third Principle: Pornology As Aesthetic Economy Or Acker Does Sade To Death

> Against the repressions of social respectability Acker uses pornography, as a total embrace of unregulated desire which works both to confront the reader's taboos and to liberate and lay bare the sexuality of the participating characters. This exploration of sexuality is never sanitized, and includes an extended plagiarism of Sade--the tension between sexual freedom and sexual degradation is not ignored but heightened, as a means of exposing the raw nerves of sexual relations. (Walsh 146)

Walsh's observations concerning Acker's debt to Sade's sexual and literary meta-formalism asserts that there are a general set of similarities between the approaches that both take in terms of the depiction of sexual "freedom and degradation." But I find that it remains highly problematic to identify the ways that both Sade and Acker can be

designated as pornographers solely on the basis of what he sees as standard applications of pornographic imagery and narrative. Particularly in Acker's case, her "heightening" of the brutality of sexual representation do seem to suggest a pornographic antecedent, yet the premises of her avant-garde writing makes such a diagnosis impossible. In regards to an aesthetic, rather than a carnal use of pornography, I would argue that Susan Suleiman's concept of the "Sadean intertext" functions as a more complex model of the basic literary structures he employed. The intertext, aside from its pornographic content, is a form that breaks taboos by way of an "unprovoked violence," an unregulated desire, and a final exposure of "raw nerves" (Suleiman 65). Acker's presentation, then dissemination of the *porn-body* may borrow from Sade, but her literary re-production of violence extends past the sadomasochistic orgies that Sade so lovingly embellished in his work. For Acker, the psychological and symbolic violence of the sublime accompanies the grotesque nature of *pornological* adventure. Much of a modernist's transgressive rationalism qualifies Sade's (and Freud's) obsession for control, but for Acker, the sexual delirium of deadly pleasure is totally irrational in its movements *and* unfulfilled in its desire. The postmodern desire that Acker depicts is grounded in the psychological compulsion, alienation and degeneration of human identity, while Sade's sexual escapades exist only for the sake of an excessive moment of exposure or pleasure in looking, writing or reading.

In Karmen MacKendrik's analysis, she argues that Sade and Masoch's unusual "sense" of the pornographic sets them apart from other, ordinary pornographers. Their

sensibility "make[s] use of pornographic techniques to problematize pleasure and unfold startling possibilities of language and narrative structure," she argues (14). In Acker's case, all wilful submissions to the inertia of this unfolding requires that her characters must accept "a regime of violence and pain" (Walsh 150). And where "Sade's characters" may "wish for crimes of infinite reverberation," while demanding "pleasures of infinite (unexperienceable) intensity" (MacKendrik 44), Acker's subjects do disassociate their pleasure from the source of its possible satiation, and "for the sake of intensity they will take pleasure through the detour of apathy and ultimately disregard "pleasure" itself (MacKendrik).

MacKendrik argues that it is only through "apathy" that the irrationalism of more perverse forms of sexual interaction become evident, and in "both pleasure *and reason* [they] deny themselves." For Sade, this apathetic rationality "is a surprisingly thorough negation" in terms of "its deliberate and explicit valuation of apathy," which causes the "Sadean text [to] move most clearly beyond both teleology and the pornographic" (MacKendrik 45). Therefore, in both Sade and Masoch, MacKendrik finds there is no evidence that either "fit within the tradition or the aims of *written* pornography" (27), and that even if both writers' works could be considered as pornographic, they would be classified as "a series of failures" (29). These same propositions are true for Acker, and her utilization of the pornographic works to promote the pornological. In MacKendrik's description of the (un)pornographic elements of Sade and Masoch's work, she emphasizes the role of language, structure and meaning in order to support a more

thorough, aesthetic re-evaluation:

> Their language is wrong; it is in Sade's case too clinical, in Masoch's too florid; it is too overloaded with details that contribute nothing to any discernible sexualization of a scene. Their structure is wrong, failing to lead to climax: Sade's narrative climaxes are immediately irrelevant (it is only the next that matters) while Masoch's never quite manage to appear. The philosophical reflections that intersperse both sets of work, though Sade's more often, would make for *very* slow one-handed reading...they are violent beyond any pornographic possibility; they are in love with the manifestations of death as it invades the very possibilities of language. (MacKendrik 29)

These statements become surprisingly substantial when Acker's work is investigated in regards to its pornographic content rather than its writing of pornography. When O's lover, W, desires to include another woman in their sexual relationship, the specifics of what transpires, are, in the end, a pornographically *numb* series of visual sequences which that are physically detached from O's body and experience. Her description of what transpires is *only* voyeuristic and painful, and in fact, here, O occupies the position of reader or witness, rather than participant :

> After dinner, he brought his girlfriend and me back to the brothel and he tied me to my bed. Needles inserted into the flesh just below the lower lashes kept the eyes open. In front of me, W made love to her....whether she loved him or not, she was being fucked inserted thrust into pummelled bruised and all that

> After dinner, he brought his girlfriend and me back to the brothel and he tied me to my bed. Needles inserted into the flesh just below the lower lashes kept the eyes open. In front of me, W made love to her....whether she loved him or not, she was being fucked inserted thrust into pummelled bruised and all that comes out is pleasure, the body is pleasure, I have known pleasure, and I am watching the endless pleasure, as it comes again again again, that I have known and now I am being refused. (Acker, "Once Upon" 269)

O's disconnection from her own body and the bodies of others is reflected on the linguistic surface of the text, and the eyes and the flesh which belong to her body are generically situated in the experience of all others outside of (rather than inside) the text. In the "opening up" of O's eyes, a shutting down of her subjective sensation occurs. This same experience is again repeated in Pussy, where those same "needles inserted into the flesh just below the lower lashes kept the eyes open" (Pussy 14), and this repetition reflects Acker's preoccupation with the pornographic Other, rather than the pornographic moment, an emphasis which magnanimously extends into more universal depictions of rupture and trauma for sadomasochistic subjects. In O's successful expulsion of "the horror" of this experience "outside and away," the model for a disinterested mode of aesthetic criticism is provided by Acker, one that allows the "pornographic scenario [to] be read as a fantasy of literary criticism," while positioning the critic in a site where she is "naked to the torture of pure interpenetrating inward 'light'" (Rose 171). When the critic or reader becomes a "witness to a form of the

terrible, [or] to the terrible as form," it is not "the source of the terror" displayed before her that is truly horrific, but the "threat" that the form poses that is most frightening.

It is within the nature of traditional, pornographic representation, "as textualized fantasy," to "not supply a single point of identification for their viewer" (Butler qtd in Meese 110), and this dislocation of a singular identification produces the "sadomasochistic dimension" of the "aesthetic performance" that is necessary in literature (Kristeva, "Is Sensation" 200) such as Acker's. Only in "the unconscious, sadomasochistic pleasure" of "identifying with a bound soul, with this palpitating and mute sensation, which is unaware of me as an other, all while including me in its touch, its saliva, its breathing, and in its dull, fleeting or striking gaze," can a "violent pleasure" result (Kristeva 200). And "this other flesh will perhaps be able, on the basis of my named pleasure, to become someone else, a subject," concludes Kristeva.

For Acker, this "other" flesh, operates as an autistic and psychotic template of individual constitution. It is an "inauthentic body" or "the object of the pornographic" (Jameson 152), more than a distinct subject. But at the same time, it is also a body that can symbolize "the authentic space of pain" (152), offering both the possibility of "violent pleasure" and empathetic identification with the Other. The character of Electra provides evidence for the tenuous conflation of these extremes when she states she is both "blocked" and "blocking," because her body has become "rigid," signalling that she is "in pain" (Acker, Digital 178). Her sadomasochistic apathy includes a self-alienated recognition of this pain, and these two contradictory impulses create the

indifference that qualifies a Freudian "de-sexualization." "This explains why coldness is the essential feature of the structure of perversion," writes Deleuze, for "it is present both in the apathy of the sadist, where it figures as theory, and in the ideal of the masochist, where it figures as phantasy" ("Repetition" 37). Therefore, as is usually the case for Acker's masochistic hysterics, the "deeper the coldness of the desexualization, the more powerful and extensive the process of [their] perverse re-sexualization" (Deleuze, Sacher 102). Acker's aesthetic emphasis on "pain," versus depictions of normalized pleasure, characterizes the repetitious and transgressive nature of sexual perversity within the text and its characters, situating the event or moment of pain within a context that "only acquires significance in relation to the forms of repetition which conditions its use," as Deleuze asserts. "Beneath the sound and fury of sadism and masochism the terrible force of repetition is at work," he concludes (Sacher 104).

The "reign of masochism" ("Once Upon" 272) that dominates each and every one of Acker's texts, is always compromised by the "nothing else" of sadistic perversity (Pussy 68), and its clear and final "descension into slime" (In Memoriam 147), symbolizes the sublimation of the grotesque. Repeatedly, Acker's depictions of a perverse degeneration in postmodern existence are forcefully asserted by way of sexual or sensual violence and frustration. In Portrait, Kathy needs "someone to love someone who can, by lightly, lightly stroking" her flesh, "tear open this reality" by ripping through her flesh until she bleeds (96). And the "familiarity of pain, [and] pleasure" that Moll Cutpurse feels, "hides the original pain" of her existence (Portrait 27) in the sublime,

chaotic universe of the text. Finally, Acker's literary sadomasochism is qualified by a more aestheticized version of the violence "Kathy" confesses to, when she remarks that she feels "a lot of pain most of the time" because she is always invading the texts and psyches of "other people's feelings, opinions, beliefs, [and] whatever they act on," and scaring or "hurt[ing] them" (Portrait 282). This sadomasochism is repeatedly characterized by Acker in terms of a new,"natural," Sadean evaluation of sexual, psychological and artistic passion and brutality. When Pussy tells her lover that she will "hurt" her "even more," because that's what she does, it's because it is "natural" for her "to hurt" others (Pussy 122). Acker's own desire to shock or disturb her reader is also part of a pornological determinism of literary desire. And as a result, "wounds" serve as "the [only] signs" of "love" in both Acker's characters and texts (In Memoriam 50), and these fissures on the surface of the page or flesh are represented in the textual spaces where "elegance and completely filthy sex fit together," and "expectations... aren't satiated" (Great 107). The wounds and wounding of character and reader are enacted again and again in Acker's pornologically obscene advancement of twisted beauty and its relationship to pain, and any pleasure in this zone is a "pleasure dependent upon textuality" (MacKendrik 30-31), which appears, most vividly, in the "very bad" writing of Sade, Masoch or Acker. Here, the "rhythms of acceleration and suspension," argues MacKendrik, produce a liminal form of "silence" (32), successfully "echo[ing]" Freud's "death drive, [which] too, is silent" (MacKendrik 36).

In conclusion, Acker's final transformation of Freud's principle[s] of pleasure

aesthetically and subversively utilizes the displeasure of dysfunctional narrative and representation in order to engage a perverse, pornological, and anti-psychoanalytical terrorism. Her extra-aesthetic disruptiveness complies, I would argue, with the "kind of mysticism in perversion," one that "we might compare" to "a 'black' theology where pleasure ceases to motivate the will and is abjured, disavowed, [or] 'renounced'" (Deleuze, Sacher 105). And Acker's "formula" for this "perverse mysticism," requires only "coldness and comfort" (Deleuze).

Conclusion: Writing As A Symptom Of Not Dying

> I am in this society living in a reality dominated by failed attempts to reject death, to deny death's presence, while more and more of my friends are dying. (Acker, *Bodies* 174)
>
> Art is given to us to prevent us dying of truth. (Nietzsche, *Genealogy* 153-4)

The act of writing serves a number of functions for Acker. She writes in order to contain the spread of her illness, yet she also writes in order to express or confess to more universal forms of trauma, suffering and marginality. She also writes in order to substantiate her pessimistic visions of existence and the world, yet remains aesthetically motivated to experiment with language, narrative and representation in what is sometimes an affirmative, or even playful manner. These ambiguous grounds present a variety of difficulties and revelations for her reader and critic.

When writers such as Burroughs, Oscar Wilde, or alternately, Acker, "attack the rhetorics of domestic and public responsibility" which they see "as a prime constituent of identity," their genealogies of "antihumanism" (Dellamora, *Apocalyptic* 112), are products of literary invention and inventiveness. These anti-humanistic manifestos move away from ideas of ethical responsibility as it is socially constructed, and this subversive energy is one that qualifies Acker's work as polemical, rather than conscientious, in opposition to what Penelope Ironstone-Catterall has suggested concerning her discursive empowerment of and/or emphasis on the Other. The apathetic character of Acker's authorial power is a dominant factor in her anti-systems

approach to aesthetics and social critique. And this oppositional ideology serves as a foundation for her literary endeavours as a force that cannot be avoided or ignored because it effectively complicates any focused interpretation of her work based solely on a reading of heterogeneity and its relationship to social critique.

Keith Ansell Pearson is quite right to suggest that the idealization of new postmodern narratives which appear to be "more consistent with the dynamics of the world system than the older anthropomorphic or humanist kind which centred on notions of personal agency," is also "as anthropomorphic as hell" (170). This occurs because "the problem with current theorizing on our inhuman futures is that it ends up reifying the demonic powers it sets out to demystify" (171). This reification is intensified in the movement of the sublime in Acker's writing, an influence which tempers indifference, yet maintains levels of discord or disturbance in order to modify the vicious or sadistic tendencies in her experimental, textual adventures, for instance. The apocalyptic sublime and the technological grotesque provide Acker with the means to advance a profound and vulnerable vision of literary hysteria. Her work is part of what Mary Wilson Carpenter describes as "the 1960s--80s' industry of literary apocalyptics" that "emphasized the transformation of the militaristic vision of apocalypse in Revelation" into an "apocalypse of the imagination" (109). Yet Acker's transformative, technologically grotesque aesthetic is also a mode of construction, destruction and re-construction that is thoroughly postmodern and deconstructive in nature. Her plagiaristic obsessiveness offers "a way of disseminating meaning across

categories, of transmitting ideas to distant cultures" or across "discourse communities that would not otherwise get the word" (Tabbi 221). Yet this "flat" rendering of the sublime's aesthetic potential is more "strange" than indifferent, argues Joseph Tabbi. But once again, a reading such as this would defeat any possibility for an ethical refusal of the purely transcendent movement of the hysterical sublime. Tabbi emphasizes Acker's alliance with cyberpunk in a critical description which finds that her use of "flattened conception[s] of character and identity" (212) are typical of this literary movement, focusing on Acker's distinct engagement with two forms of sublime representation as strategies which act in the interest of a broad "functionality" (Tabbi 212) and "a new level of pragmatic functioning" that indicates cyberpunk's concern with cloning or reproduction. The "construct" or coded replication of a person's operational being" signifies a concern with the refusal of humanist conceptions of individual unity by presenting functional forms of postmodern fragmentation, and the constructs of Cathy or Kathy are symbols of this refusal. However, they are also the trace remainders of Acker's "paranoia," or obsessively reactive "literary terrorism," indicating perhaps, nothing so much as the "author's increased awareness" of her "own marginality" (Tabbi 224). Yet it is also true that all Acker's characters serve as embodied examples of postmodernism's ineffectual institutions and structures, and when I consider Keith Ansell Pearson's definition of "capital," which is the "accumulation of process," I also find Acker's character of "Capitol" (*In Memoriam*) to be an immanent example of a figure who is also able to "construct" herself "as the transcendental ground of all change

and innovation" (Ansell Pearson 171). This conflation of commodity with identity is a searing indictment of late capitalist reification. When Acker reproduces herself within her writing, or writing that belongs to others, she reproduces only certain characters in a variety of texts, thereby exhibiting an overt uncanniness in her preoccupation with sublime incidents of replication. And in her emphasis on the sterile and impotent bodies of hysterics and grotesques, she offers yet another story about the nature of excessive and disseminatory aesthetics. These two *movements*, in themselves, are representative of metaphorical and metonymical expressions of hysteria, as David-Menard argues, and the symbolic excess and/or absence of the metaphoric sublime in Acker's work becomes "exploited in hysteria towards the ends of a plastic activity that serves the passion for presence" (176). Meanwhile, the "symptom" of metonymy that becomes "the language of discharge (David-Menard), produces a discourse that can offer no resurrection for characters, who become, by the end of each novel, only "words" that "render themselves forgotten, insofar as they appear wordless" (Deguy 24). They are perfect reflections of the "negativity" of Acker's work which "work[s] against oneself" (Deguy).

And finally, in Acker's advancement of a politically revolutionary form of masochism (Brande), the sublime advances her ambiguous, and sometimes contradictory ideology in order to usurp a postmodern predisposition towards treating the "subject" as "the elevation of the failure of subjectivity into a general condition of all subjectivity, a failure that is then celebrated as necessarily subversive" (Stewart,

Sublime 10). The necessarily idealistic and "formulaic" strategy of such an elevation is countered by the extremely bleak settings and events that characterize her work as a darker, avant-garde deconstruction of identity and subjectivity. For Suzanne Stewart, this formula idolizes both masochism and the "masochistic position," and it is grounded in a "self-dissolution" or "undoing of self or subjectivity" that appears to be "politically desirable" (10). Although a valorization of masochism can be read in reference to Acker's sadomasochism, I remain certain that there is also adequate evidence to refute its idealization. The grotesque transformations of body, mind and text that occur once the sublime dominates the scene of writing, and the evident forms of physical and psychological suffering that characters experience within such deformation, are perhaps the clearest indications of Acker's nihilistic views concerning the possibility of self-empowerment through pain and masochism. But contradictions such as the ones I have just discussed are not surprising because the sublime, as Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe asserts, is "the contradiction par excellence" which art attempts to "reconcile" (*Of The Sublime* 86). Further, the "truth of the sublime" is "thus dialectical, is dialectics itself," causing the sites where it becomes visible to address the "sublime [as] the incompletion of the beautiful," as well as "the beautiful seeking to complete itself" (Lacoue-Labarthe 86). In postmodernity, this dialectic is posited upon the foundation of a sublime "retrenchment onto the little subject after the failure of the great Subject (Subject of history, or Subject of humanity), allowing all art to function only limitedly, "without having any criteria or ground onto which to articulate" its resistance (Lacoue-Labarthe,

"On The Sublime" 12). In Acker's work, the limited scope of the aesthetic resistance she advances appears as a *legible ruin*, "a ruin of the presuppositions of aesthetics itself" (Lacoue-Labarthe 14), as well as an engagement with modes of experimentalism that are deconstructively playful, strategies that mediate the tragic awe of the classical symptoms of the sublime with a *comedic irreverency* of perversion and piracy.

As much as Acker's portrayals of female hysterics and perverts rely upon essentialist stereotypes from Freud et al, they are also "ironic variant[s] of embodied materialism" that are "manifestly opposed to psychological, social and biological essentialism" because they routinely "aim to undo classical dualistic oppositions and to replace them with living processes of transformation" (Lykke and Braidotti 248). In this, Acker produces the monsters, goddesses and cyborgs that Lykke and Braidotti offer as examples of possible, materialist subversion. Acker's hysterics, in particular, are one element of a series of "literary [or psychological] models" rather than case studies or ready-mades (Meindl 3). In Acker's work, the grotesque, sublime, and monstrous function as an interconnected series of "episodic" characteristics which belong to one particular aesthetic order. Every American text that is marked by contrasts and, discrepancies is "grotesque," states Paula M. Uruburu, because of "the conflict between romanticism and pragmatism in American thought, and between ideology and reality in American life as ideal breeding grounds for the grotesque" (Uruburu qtd in Meindl 5). The grotesque represents "the fragmented American psyche" (Uruburu), that has been produced by a "changing framework of metaphysics" (Meindl 5) within postmodernity,

one which, in turn, creates American "metafictionists or counterrealists" who imaginatively "joust with the monstrosities" of their age (4). In a movement from wider social organisms of dislocation and/or alienation in late capitalism, into more individual examinations of fragmentation and madness, Acker effectively bridges the gap between the universal and the particular in her representations of the grotesque.

"The monstrous body that once represented everything is now represented as potentially meaning anything--it may be the outcast, the outlaw, the parasite, the pervert, the embodiment of uncontrollable sexual and violent urges, the foreigner, [and] the misfit" (Halberstam 27). "The monster," argues Judith Halberstam, "is all of these but monstrosity has become a conspiracy of bodies rather than a singular form." Anne Balsamo's examination of cyberpunk's "techno-bodies" finds that novelistic depictions in this group of certain forms of "embodiment," are "illustrated by various incarnations of the techno-body" ("Forms Of Technological" 224), leading me to suggest that Acker's "conspiracy" of bodies is characterized by her anti-systems aesthetic's use of the grotesque as well as an (non)ideology that is further amended by the technological sublime and its distinctive modes of repression, inscription and disappearance in regards to these bodies. Bodies in Acker's novels, particularly female ones, find they are usually "redefined as a machine interface" once they are "divorced from the locus of knowledge," and from that point onwards, they appear as disembodied eyes, staggered visual frames, and fragmentary narrative perspectives inside a text (Balsamo 226-7). These redesigned bodies and spaces are monstrous

"system[s] of total exposure" that become qualified by deformed vision and surface, and in Acker's novels, this system produces an alternative to Marcel Hénaff's "erotic panopticon," which fulfils "the demand for a total exposure" in writing such as Sade's (223). Acker's rearrangement of "the picture" that "must be uncovered at once" in sadomasochistic literature, offers a truly deconstructionist utilization of pornographic "obscenity" by subverting, yet representing its standard forms and techniques in order to produce a postmodern ambiguity within the order of the radical, itself. In a movement away from Sade's "factory of pleasures" (Hénaff 226), Acker's kaleidoscopic funhouse is an obscure and disjointed series of perspectives or rooms that advance nightmare and perversity, and literally make an unconscious mess of both the *book* and the *world*. The monstrous bodies that inhabit this funhouse, under the influence of cyberpunk imperatives, become no "more than excess baggage for the cyberspace traveller" (Balsamo 227), and these techno-bodies, unlike pre-modern examples of Sadean solidity, are parts of the fuller formation of a "disappearing body" which acts as a "response to cultural anxieties about body invasion" (Balsamo 233). Acker may advance a communal "conspiracy of heterogeneous bodies in order to emphasize the collective deformity of society, but her literary materialism is again ambiguous concerning what Hénaff argues is Sade's "pleasure of accumulation," where the "saturation" of "all" the body's "sexual spaces" provides a connection of one body to " a maximum number of other bodies" in his realization of the "body-group" (222). In cyberpunks' re-design of the singular aspects of individual immanence, the emphasis is less sexual, and more

hysterical, in terms of a mass phenomenon. The group dynamic operates for Acker as either a body of violent gang members, terrorists or street-punks who are effortlessly transformed into an orgy or a posse in *Empire*, or, alternately, as the body of the isolated, self-destructive and marginal individual in novels such as *In Memoriam* and *Great Expectations*, whose schizophrenia and hysteria emphasize the powerlessness of the subject against larger, sublime conspiracies in society. In novels such as *Pussy*, the accumulation of criminal bodies and perverse pleasures is evident in the scriptural saturation of the narrative by the details of fragmentary linguistic and figural forms. And further, the disruption of solitary experience and nomadic transitions of the individual by groups of hysterics or automatons provides yet another contradictory implementation of Sade's methods.

For Penelope Ironstone-Catterall, Balsamo's "disappearing body" is a response that cannot be communal or collective because there is a strong "correspondence between (hybrid) subjectivity and the body as a site on and through which power is articulated and signifiers of Otherness are inscribed," she argues (170). This body of the Other is a virtual "island in the net," or a "temporary autonomous zone," that Acker's "tracing and remapping of the social encodings that mark the feared and fascinating Other," seeks to identify. Ironstone-Catterall properly points towards Acker's approach to identifying the isolation and constitution of this Other, but I would argue that the scope of these depictions is not politically or ethically clear. What appears to be a dialectical movement in Ironstone-Catterall's description of the

subjectivity and material characteristics of the Other as it exists in networks of power can be seen in Acker's assertion of the primacy and alterity of the Other within her random deployment of the grotesque and/or monstrous body. But what Ironstone-Catterall suggests is the "recovery" (170) or redoubling of this subject position in Acker's engagement with the Other is what I would read as a series of transmissions of socio-political determinisms and destructive forces that sacrificially offer up this Other on the altar of avant-garde *Art*. The strong, aesthetic imperatives that underlie Acker's writing formally expose the Other, yet contaminate the political correctness of its validation or resurrection. Inherent in the hysterical sublime is an unpredictable and potentially explosive urge to create, yet destroy the formal elements and ideologies of Otherness that have been hegemonically constructed. Therefore, Acker's work is both "dialogical," in the way that it does not seek to "transcend social relations" (Ironstone-Catterall 172), and remains focused on the socius or "body-group" (Hénaff) of even the most perverse sub-cultures, as *well* as "dialectical," in its fervent movement towards expressing an inherently egotistical desire for transcendence from material suffering. As both critique and artistically experimental work, Acker's writing employs *both* the formal inconsistencies of aesthetic radicality, and the critical perspectives of social and psychological deconstruction.

However, both dialecticism and dialogicism can be interpreted as inauthentic structures in Acker's work because the influence of "technology," which is sublimely expansive and mechanically appropriative of all literary forms and their content,

provides a broader, scriptural machine with which to express the total, existential anguish of human consciousness and existence in postmodernity. Acker's literary experimentalism provides standard representations of "both the metaphor for the artificial falsity of the self, and the literal mechanism for an escape from that constricting identity" (Lyndenberg 420). Hysteria, as a masochistic and actively defensive reaction to technology or science's invasive nature, acts as Acker's strong, aesthetic advancement of a disenchanted consciousness (see Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer), a demeanour that belongs to "posthuman bodies" which "thrive in subcultures without culture," because there are only "subcultures" (Halberstam and Livingston 4). And again, the radical, marginal or heterogeneous *thing* that is at risk, is appropriated into the ideology of the mainstream where it is consumed and digested (as literature and art are), only to be shit out into the sewers, streets and gutters of novels such as Acker's. This consumptive process is identical to the way that technology alters "the very nature of our senses and of our nervous systems," creating modifications by practical and "biological innovation" (Shaviro, "Two Lessons" 39). And in recuperating the sublime debris of what is aesthetically beautiful, Acker performs what Burroughs had advanced as a "parasitism, corruption, plagiarism [and] surplus appropriation [that] is, in fact, conterminous with life itself" (Shaviro).

But as a technological question, this model is extremely complex. For Marcel Hénaff, the connections between "a certain model of the body and a certain stage in the development of technology and industry," provoke questions such as these: "The

mechanization of bodies, the madness of the orgies, the representation of incredible violence done to bodies, to what do they refer?" (228). "Are we dealing with a work that is simply monstrous," he asks, or "are these frenzies and this violence signs of a crisis" on a broader level? Sade's emphasis on process, design, rational addition and subtraction, reflect a pre-modernist compulsion to organize and taxonomize the totality of the world through the body and desire, in general. But this is not Acker's aim. Although I have drawn a number of correspondences between Sade, Genet, Bataille and Acker, it remains extremely important that her cyber-literary crisis of aesthetic composition and existential verisimilitude be known by her historical context, one which testifies to the total, systematic degeneration of subjects and knowledge in the hysterical sublime. Where Sade's pleasure was not concerned with "sensuality or happiness" (Hénaff 229), because it was based upon "the certainty of success" or accomplishment maintained by "apathy" and "operational" desire, Acker's pleasure is *far too* aesthetic and textual to allow such an anal, methodological compulsion to develop. If Sade's position was one that situated him in "between the intersection of two worlds, one of aristocratic value and [the other,] the operational world of technical efficiency" (Hénaff 232), then Acker must be directly positioned at a point where the corporate hysteria of late capitalism's psychotic paranoia is delineated from a sublimely dysfunctional environment of irrationality and excess. And at this boundary zone, the grotesque, abject or monstrous body is martyred by the brutal forces of commodity culture's madness, then resurrected by way of a perversely criminal and technologically

transgressive creativity that belongs, exclusively, to postmodern *Art*. And for Acker, as is the case for Sade, it is only "through the provocation of a text of fiction, [that] the premonition of a new complicity--a possible but not a necessary one--of all the horrors of our century" is aesthetically and hysterically revealed (Hénaff 233). "The work's madness, as any madness, speaks a difficult truth that is incumbent upon us to confront," advises Hénaff, because there is not "any other way or another reason to read Sade" (233). Or Acker, I would argue.

Acker's *poetics of dying* presupposes the hysterical sublime and relies upon the grotesque and/or martyred body in order to propose a variety of perverse, literary gestures that portray the fear, decay and brutality of the psychological and physical processes of death. "I know I have to follow death until its end," that "road [that] passes through putrefaction and disintegration," she writes (*My Mother* 22). Here, Acker testifies to her *aliveness*, and the assertion that she is *not dying* permits all forms of textual (de)composition, (de)construction and confession to appear. This aesthetic imperative allows her to *think* "in the face of death" (*My Mother* 29), and in the numerous passages where she "faces" death, her *writing* away of its threatening presence is an extreme expression of "the will to live" (*My Mother* 29). Yet Acker also advances an *unpoetic literature of survival* that desecrates the possibility of human companionship, intellectual advancement or psychological and sexual happiness. Her work, in general, is a "sort of a horrible *tour de force*" (Burroughs, *Re/Search* 15) which luxuriates in the cruelty and unpredictability of human existence. In a guttural, visceral

and pornological fashion, Acker disqualifies both her work and herself from a qualification of literary greatness by compulsively returning to primal sites of horror, pain, and loss.

In general, works of art that originate from suffering and trauma are "special objects" which remain "open" and therefore, leave knowledge also open like "a wound" (Schweizer 210). The "unreachable, sacred, ineffable point radically beyond the limits of knowledge" can then be represented, concludes Schweizer. As a literature of *loss*, forms of expression such as these unleash "all the forms of figures of desire," which, in turn, propel the engine of a "gigantic operation" of "unique and polymorphic implementation of meaning" (Nancy 33). This operation leaves a "hole full of fever and disorder" in its subject, "the fever and disorder of any identification that is condemned in advance to an infinite exhaustion of the idea of the final signification of death" (Nancy). Death haunts Acker's work subtextually, *and* contaminates her characters, psychologically, and in a manner that is identical to Burroughs' production of textual "spells" or trance-state writings (Brion Gysin, *Re/Search* 45). Acker also invokes the spirit of terminal modes of Being and discourse by first, assuming "that the worst has happened explicit and subject to strategy," and next, producing "accident" to the "color of vowels" and violence to the flesh of her characters and texts (Burroughs, *Re/Search* 36). Both "femininity and death cause a disorder to [all] stability" by marking out "moments of ambivalence, disruption or duplicity and their eradication" (Stacey 240), producing a writing that appears as an *after-effect*, as well as a fragmentary attempt to re-

stabilize itself through an assertion of "survival and closure" (241). This form of writing is "a symptom of not dying," argues Stacey, an expression that exhibits, while indulging in, "a fantasy of control, of authorship of the narrative trajectory of my health, a fantasy that contradicts my knowledge of my own mortality" (241-2). This writing is both a *compulsive* denial of death, through the creation of a *convulsive* or hysterical art, as well as an exhibition of literary *dying* that necessarily proceeds towards a point of termination or an other end. Writing such as this acts as "a sign of life" because it asserts the following statement: "I must still be alive, I am producing" (Stacey 242), and "thus in this vision of death as the source of knowledge and yet ultimately unthinkable, romance and refusal go hand in hand" concludes Stacey (244).

On the other hand, "the mortal condition and the moment of perishing" are always "at stake when the *sublime* appears," because it takes on the characteristics of a narrative rise and fall," and because it "belongs to the mortal curve and surmounts it," while it also "overhangs it tangentially like a remarkable "turning point" [*point de rebroussement*], a pineal apex where the body is united with and suspends itself in the soul, a utopia of infinitesimal weightlessness as at the labile point of the highest leap" (Deguy 9-10). Once such a point of climax is reached, "nothing remains "in the air," and the fall away from the sublime is fatal" (Ansell Pearson 189).

The "contagion" and "revelation" of the sublime's influence on literature, in particular, promotes both the exteriorization and interiorization of "a latent undercurrent of cruelty and perversity" (Ansell Pearson 189) in the hysterical delirium

of sublime terror that Acker's work sustains. And the compulsive depiction of ugliness and beauty that rhythmically oscillate in Acker's contradictory themes and images utilizes the conditions of a sublime suspension in order to compose spectacles of symptomological excess and decomposition.

So, finally, as both a *compulsive and convulsive* aesthetic, Acker's *writing-as-recuperation or restitution* is a multifarious body of movement that showcases fictional and autobiographical bodies that have "lived to tell the tale"(Stacey 245). In the chiasmus "between the living and the dead" (*Bodies* 39), Acker's hysterical and technological sublime embraces grotesque and perverse forms and content, crudely pushing them out into the world as if they were a gift that is "given to us to prevent us from dying of truth" (Nietzsche).

Bibliography

Acker, Kathy. *Portrait Of An Eye*. N.Y.: Grove Press, 1980.

---, *Great Expectations*. N.Y.: Grove Press, 1982.

---, *Empire Of The Senseless*. N.Y.: Grove Press, 1988.

---, *In Memoriam To Identity*. N.Y.: Grove Press, 1990.

---, *Hannibal Lecter, My Father*. N.Y.: Semiotext[e], 1991.

---, "Kathy Acker: Interview." *Angry Women: Re/Search*. San Francisco: Re/search Publications, 1991. 177-185.

---, *My Mother: Demonology*. N.Y.: Grove Press, 1993.

---, "The Language Of The Body." *The Penguin Book Of Lesbian Short Stories*. Ed. Margaret Reynolds. N.Y.: Penguin Bks., 1993. 399-411.

---, *Pussy, King Of The Pirates*. N.Y.: Grove Press, 1996.

---, "Once Upon A Time, Not Long Ago, O." *Centuries' Ends, Narrative Means*. Ed. Robert Newman. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996. 261-275.

---, *Bodies Of Work: Essays*. London: Serpent's Tail, 1997.

---, "Requiem." *Digital Delirium*. Ed. Arthur, Marilouise Kroker. N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1997. 174-181.

---, "Requiem Act I: daddy missing." *The Eight Technologies Of Otherness*, Ed. Sue Golding. N.Y.: Routledge, 1997. 265-276.

Adorno, Theodor. *Kierkegaard: Construction Of The Aesthetic*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Ansell Pearson, Keith. *Viroid Life: Perspectives On Nietzsche And The Transhuman Condition*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1997.

Appignanesi, Lisa, Ed. *Postmodernism: ICA Documents*. London: Free Association Books, 1989.

Arata, Stephen D.. "Strange Cases, Common Fates: Degeneration And The Pleasures Of Professional Reading." *Centuries' Ends, Narrative Means*. Ed. Robert Newman. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996. 178-187.

Arato, Andrew, Ed. "Introduction: Political Sociology And Critique Of Politics." *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. Eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt. N.Y.: Urizen Bks, 1978. 3-25.

Babich, Babette, Ed. *From Phenomenology To Thought, Errancy, And Desire*. Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995.

Ballard, J.G.. "Project For A Glossary Of The 20th Century." *Incorporations*. Eds. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter. N.Y.: Urzone Inc., 1992. 268-279.

Balsamo, Anne. *Technologies Of The Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.

---, "Forms Of Technological Embodiment: Reading The Body In Contemporary Culture." *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/ Cyberpunk*. Eds. Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows. London: Sage Pub., 1995. 215-236.

Barasch, Frances K.. *The Grotesque: A Study In Meanings*. The Hague: Monton and Co., N.V. Pub., 1971.

Barbé Hammer, Stephanie. *The Sublime Crime: Fascination, Failure, And Form In Literature Of The Enlightenment*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994.

Barker, Frances. *The Tremulous Private Body*. London: Methuen, 1984.

Barr, Marleen S. And Richard Feldstein, Eds. *Discontented Discourses*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989.

Bataille, Georges. *Visions Of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, Ed. Allan Stoekl. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

---, ed. *The Trial Of Gilles De Rais*. Trans. Richard Robinson. Los Angeles: Amok Books, 1991.

Baudrillard, Jean. *The Ecstasy Of Communication*. N.Y.: Semiotext(e), 1988.

Belsey, Catherine. "Desire In Theory: Freud, Lacan, Derrida," *Textual Practice*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Winter 1993. 384-411.

Benamou, Michel. "Notes On The Technological Imagination." *The Technological Imagination*. Eds. Teresa de Lauretis, Andreas Huyssen and Kathleen Woodward. Madison: University of Wisconsin, Coda Press, 1980. 65-75.

Benjamin, Jessica. *The Bonds Of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, And The Problem Of Domination*. N.Y.: Pantheon Bks, 1988.

Bennington, Geoffrey. *Lyotard: Writing The Event*. N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Bernstein, Carol L.. *The Celebration Of Scandal: Toward The Sublime In Victorian Urban Fiction*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991.

Bernstein, J.M.. *The Fate Of Art: Aesthetic Alienation From Kant To Derrida To Adorno*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992.

Black, Joel. *The Aesthetics Of Murder*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.

Blanchot, Maurice. *The Gaze Of Orpheus*. Trans. Lydia Davis. N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1981.

Blum, Virginia L.. *Hide And Seek: The Child Between Psychoanalysis And Fiction*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995.

Bogue, Ronald, and Marcel Cornis-Pope, eds. *Violence And Mediation In Contemporary Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.

Bompiana, Ginevra. "The Chimera Herself." *Fragments For A History Of The Human Body Part One*. Eds. Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi. N.Y.: Urzone Inc., 1989. 364-409.

Boothby, Richard. ""Now You See It...": The Dynamics Of Presence And Absence In Psychoanalysis." *From Phenomenology To Thought, Errancy, And Desire*. Ed. Babette Babich. Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995. 397-433.

Boym, Svetlana. *Death In Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths Of The Modern Poet*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Braidotti, Rosi. "Signs Of Wonder And Traces Of Doubt: On Teratology And Embodied Differences." *Between Monsters, Goddesses And Cyborgs*. Eds. Nina Lykke, Rosi Braidotti. London: Zed Books, 1996. 135-151.

Brande, David. "Making Yourself A Body Without Organs: The Cartography Of Pain In Kathy Acker's *Don Quixote*." *Genre* 24. Summer 1991. 191-209.

Bronfen, Elisabeth. "The Jew As Woman's Symptom: Kathlyn Bigelow's Conflictive Representation Of Feminine Power." *Violence And Mediation In Contemporary Culture*. Eds. Ronald Bogue and Marcel Cornis-Pope. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996. 71-103.

Brooks, Peter. "Freud's Masterplot: Questions Of Narrative." *Literature And Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Shoshana Felman. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977. 280-300.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry Into The Origin Of Our Ideas Of The Sublime And Beautiful*. London: A. Robertson and Co., 1824.

Burroughs, William S.. "Early Routines" and "The Cut-Up Method Of Brion Gysin." *Re/Search #4/5*. Eds. V. Vale and Andrea Juno. San Francisco: V/Search Pub., 1982. 12-15 anmd 35-38.

Butler, Judith. *Excitable Speech: A Politics Of The Performative*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1997.

Canguilhem, Georges. "Machine And Organism." *Incorporations*. Eds. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter. N.Y.: Zone Bks, 1992. 44-69.

Caputo, John. *Against Ethics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.

Carroll, David. *Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1987.

Carroll, Noël. *The Philosophy Of Horror Or Paradoxes Of The Heart*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1990.

Caws, Mary Ann. "Ladies Shot And Painted: Female Embodiment In Surrealist Art." *The Female Body In Western Culture*. Ed. Susan R. Suleiman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986. 262-287.

Chisholm, Dianne. "Avant-Garde Sexualities: Eroticism In An Age Of Barbarism." *ACCUTE*. Vol.19, No.1, March 1993. 5-22.

Cranny-Francis, Anne. *The Body In The Text*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press,

1995.

Crary, Jonathan and Sanford Kwinter (Eds). *Incorporations*. N.Y.: Urzone Inc., 1992.

---, Michel Feher, Hal Foster, and Sanford Kwinter, Eds. *Fragments For A History Of The Human Body Part Two*. N.Y.: Urzone Inc., 1989.

Crowther, Paul. *The Kantian Sublime: From Morality To Art*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

Dagognet, François. "Toward A Biopsychiatry." *Incorporations*. Eds. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter. N.Y.: Urzone Inc., 1992. 516-541.

Das, Veena. "Language And Body: Transactions In The Construction Of Pain." *Social Suffering*. Eds. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. 67-92.

David-Ménard, Monique. *Hysteria From Freud To Lacan: Body And Language In Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Davis, Lennard J.. "Nude Venuses, Medusa's Body, And Phantom Limbs." *The Body And Physical Difference: Discourses Of Disability*. Eds. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997. 51-74.

De Bolla, Peter. *The Discourse Of The Sublime*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989.

De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice Of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

Deguy, Michel. "The Discourse Of Exaltation." *Of The Sublime: Presence In Question*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993. 5-24.

De Lauretis, Teresa. *Technologies Of Gender: Essays On Theory, Film, And Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

---, Andreas Huysson and Kathleen Woodward, Eds. *The Technological Imagination*. Wisconsin: Coda Press, 1980.

De Sade, Marquis. *Justine, Philosophy In The Bedroom, And Other Writings*. Trans. Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse. N.Y.: Grove Press, 1965.

Deleule, Didier. "The Living Machine: Psychology As Organology." *Incorporations*. Eds. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter. N.Y.: Urzone Inc., 1992. 202-233.

Deleuze, Gilles. "Repetition For Itself." *Writing And Psychoanalysis*. Ed. John Lechte. N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1996. 19-40.

---, *Difference And Repetition*. N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1994.

---, "Ethnology: Spinoza And Us." *Incorporations*. Eds. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter. N.Y.: Urzone Inc., 1992. 628-633.

---, "Mediators." *Incorporations*. Eds. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter. N.Y.: Urzone Inc., 1992. 280-295.

---, *Negotiations: 1972-1990*. N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1990.

---, *Nietzsche And Philosophy*. N.Y.: Columbia University Press. 1983.

---, *Sacher-Masoch: An Interpretation*. London: Faber and Faber, 1971.

---, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism And Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

---, and Félix Guattari. *What Is Philosophy? N.Y.:* Columbia University Press, 1994.

Dellamora, Richard. *Apocalyptic Overtures: Sexual Politics And The Sense Of An Ending*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994.

---, Ed. "Queer Apocalypse: Framing William Burroughs." *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory And Cultural Practice At The End*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995. 136-165.

Derrida, Jacques. *A Derrida Reader: Between The Blinds*. Ed. Peggy Kamuf. N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1991.

---, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Trans. Eric Prenowitz. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Doane, Mary Ann. "The Clinical Eye: Medical Discourses In The "Woman's Film" Of The 1940s." *The Female Body In Western Culture*. Ed. Susan R. Suleiman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986. 152-174.

---, "Technophilia: Technology, Representation, And The Feminine." *Body/Politics: Women And The Discourses Of Science*. Eds. Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth. N.Y.: Routledge, 1990. 163-176.

Dolan, Jill. *Feminist Spectator As Critic*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988.

Du Bois, Page. *Torture And Truth*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1991.

Elsner, John and Roger Cardinal, Eds. *The Cultures Of Collecting*. London: Reaktion Books, 1994.

Ender, Evelyne. *Sexing The Mind: Nineteenth-Century Fictions Of Hysteria*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Epstein, Julia, and Kristina Straub, Eds. *BodyGuards: The Cultural Politics Of Gender Ambiguity*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1991.

Featherstone, Mike, and Roger Burrows, Eds. *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures Of Technological Embodiment*. London: SAGE Pub., 1995.

Feenberg, Andrew, and Alistair Hannay Eds. *Technology And The Politics Of Knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Feher, Michel, Ed. "Introduction." *Fragments For A History Of The Human Body Part One*. Eds. Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff, and Nadia Tazi. N.Y.:

Urzone Inc., 1989. 10-17.

Feit Diehl, Joanne. *Women Poets And The American Sublime*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Felman, Shoshana. *Writing And Madness*. N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985.

---, "Turning The Screw Of Interpretation." *Literature And Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Shoshana Felman. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977. 94-207.

---, Ed. *Literature And Psychoanalysis: The Question Of Reading Otherwise*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977.

---, *Jacques Lacan And The Adventure Of Insight*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Felski, Rita. "Fin de Siècle, Fin de Sexe: Transsexuality And The Death Of History." *Centuries' Ends, Narrative Means*. Ed. Robert Newman. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996. 226-245

Ferguson, Frances. "The Nuclear Sublime." *Diacritics 14*. Summer 1984. 4-10.

---, *Solitude And The Sublime*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1992.

Fiedler, Leslie. *Freaks: Myths And Images Of The Secret Self*. N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1978.

Foale, Susan. "Speechless." *The Missing Text*. Ed. Marysia Lewandowska. London: Chance Books, 1991. 81-99.

Forrester, John. "'Mille e tre': Freud And Collecting." *The Cultures Of Collecting*. Eds. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal. London: Reaktion Books, 1994. 224-251.

Foster, Susan Leigh, Ed. *Corporealities*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1996

Foster, Thomas. "The Sex Appeal Of The Inorganic: Posthuman Narratives And The Construction Of Desire." *Centuries' Ends, Narrative Mean.*, Ed. Robert Newman. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996. 281-289.

Foucault, Michel. "The Subject And Power." *Critical Inquiry. No. 8*, Summer 1982. 777-795.

Freeman, Barbara Claire. *The Feminine Sublime: Gender And Excess In Women's Fiction*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Freeman, Lucy and Herbert S. Stream. *Freud And Women*. N.Y.: Continuum, 1987.

Freud, Sigmund, and Josef Breuer. *Studies On Hysteria*. London: Pelican Books, 1974.

Freud, Sigmund. *A General Selection From The Works Of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. John Rickman. N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957.

---, "Woman As Castrated Man." *Sigmund Freud, New Introductory Lectures On Psychoanalysis*. N.Y.: W. W. Norton, 1965.

---, *The Case Of Dora*. N.Y.: W. W. Norton, 1952.

---, "Psychopathic Characters On Stage," and "Dostoevsky And Parricide." *Writing And Psychoanalysis*. Ed. John Lechte. N.Y.: St.

Martin's Press, 1996. 122-135.

---, *Civilization And Its Discontents*. London: Hogarth Press, 1929.

Fuss, Diana. *Identification Papers*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1995.

Fynsk, Christopher. "What Remains At A Crucifixion: Nietzsche/Bacon." *The Eight Technologies Of Otherness*. Ed. Sue Golding. N.Y.: Routledge, 1997. 79-104.

Gallop, Jane. *Reading Lacan*. Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Garland Thomson, Rosemarie. "Disabled Women As Powerful Women In Petry, Morrison, And Lorde." *The Body And Physical Difference: Discourses Of Disability*. Eds. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997. 240-265.

Genet, Jean. *The Thief's Journal*. 1949. Trans. Bernard Frechtman. N.Y.: Grove Press Inc., 1964.

Gilman, Sander L.. *Disease And Representation*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

Golding, Sue, Ed. *The Eight Technologies Of Otherness*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Gonzalez-Crussi, F.. *Suspended Animation: Six Essays On The Preservation Of Bodily Parts*. N.Y.: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1995.

Gordon, Jan. "The Talking Cure (Again)." *The Body And Physical Difference: Discourses Of Disability*. Eds. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997. 202-222.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1990.

---, *Space, Time, And Perversion*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1995.

Guattari, Félix. *Chaosophy*. N.Y.: Semiotext[e], 1995.

Gysin, Brion. "Here To Go: Planet R-101." *Re/search #4/5*. Eds. V. Vale and Andrea Juno. San Francisco: V/Search Pub., 1982. 44-46.

Halberstam, Judith. *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror And The Technology Of Monsters*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.

---, and Ira Livingston, Eds. *Posthuman Bodies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, And Women: The Reinvention Of Nature*. London: Free Association Bks, 1991.

---, "When Man Is On The Menu." *Incorporations*. Eds. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter. N.Y.: Urzone Inc., 1992. 36-43.

Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. *On The Grotesque: Strategies Of Contradiction In Art And Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

Harter, Deborah A.. *Bodies In Pieces: Fantastic Narrative And The Poetics Of The Fragment*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Hénaff, Marcel. "Sade, The Mechanization Of The Libertine Body, And The Crisis Of Reason." *Technology And The Politics Of Knowledge*. Eds. Andrew Feenberg and Alistair Hannay. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. 213-235.

Huet, Marie-Hélène. *Monstrous Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Ingebretsen, Edward J.. *Maps Of Heaven, Maps Of Hell: Religious Terror As Memory From The Puritans To Stephen King*. N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1996.

Irigaray, Luce. *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward A Culture Of Difference*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1993.

---, *The Irigaray Reader: Luce Irigaray*, Ed. Margaret Whitford. Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 1991.

---, *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Ironstone-Catterall, Penelope. "Imagining The Other Among Us: Kathy Acker Between New York And "Algeria." *Borders And Margins: Postcolonialism And Postmodernism*. Frankfurt: Vervuet Verlag, 1995. 169-179.

Jacobus, Mary. *Reading Women: Essays In Feminist Criticism*. N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic Of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.

Jardine, Alice. *Gynesis: Configurations Of Woman And Modernity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Kahane, Claire. *Passions Of The Voice: Hysteria, Narrative, And The Figure Of The Speaking Woman, 1850-1915*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Kahn, Douglas, and Gregory Whitehead, eds. *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, And The Avant-Garde*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992.

Kant, Immanuel. *Observations On The Feeling Of The Beautiful And Sublime*. Trans. John Goldthwait. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960.

---, "Critique Of Judgment." *Philosophies Of Art And Beauty*. Eds. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964. 28--343.

Kappeler, Susan. *The Pornography Of Representation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Kavaler-Adler, Susan. *The Compulsion To Create: A Psychoanalytic Study Of Women Artists*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1993.

Klausmann, Ulrike, Marion Meinzerin and Gabriel Kuhn. *Women Pirates And The Politics Of The Jolly Roger*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1997.

Kleinman, Arthur, Veena Das, Margaret Lock, Eds. *Social Suffering*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

Knapp, Steven. *Personification And The Sublime: Milton To Coleridge*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.

Kofman, Sarah. *Freud And Fiction*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991.

---, *The Childhood Of Art*. N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Korte, Barbara. *Body Language In Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.

Kosofsky Sedgwick, Eve. "Epidemics Of The Will." *Incorporations*. Eds. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter. N.Y.: Urzone Inc., 1992. 582-595.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers Of Horror: An Essay On Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1982.

---, *Revolution In Poetic Language*. N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1984.

---, "Holbein's Dead Christ." *Fragments For A History Of The Human Body Part One*. Eds. Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff, and Nadia Tazi. N.Y.: Urzone Inc., 1989. 238-269.

---, "Is Sensation A Language?" *Writing And Psychoanalysis: A Reader*. Ed. John Lechte. N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1996. 183-204.

Kroker, Arthur and David Cook. *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture And Hyper-Aesthetics*. Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1986.

---, and Marilouise Kroker, Eds. *The Last Sex: Feminism And Outlaw Bodies*. Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1993.

---, and Marilouise Kroker, Eds. *Body Invaders: Panic Sex In America*, "Panic Sex In America." Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1987.

Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits: A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. N.Y.: W. W. Norton and Co., 1977.

Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe. *The Subject Of Philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

---, "Sublime Truth." *Of The Sublime: Presence In Question*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993. 71-108.

---, "On The Sublime." *Postmodernism: ICA Documents*. Ed. Lisa Appignanesi. London: Free Associations Bks., 1989. 11-14.

Land, Nick. "Meat (Or How To Kill Oedipus In Cyberspace)." *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk*. Eds. Mike Featherston and, Roger Burrows. London: SAGE Pub., 1995. 191-204.

Landsberg, Alison. "Prosthetic Memory: *Total Recall* And *Blade Runner*." *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk*. Eds. Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows. London: SAGE Pub., 1995. 175-190.

Law, John, Ed. *Monsters, Machines And Sociotechnical Relations*. London: Routledge, 1991.

Lechte, John, Ed. *Writing And Psychoanalysis: A Reader*. N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1996.

Leigh Foster, Susan, ed. *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture And Power*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1996.

Levinas, Immanuel. *Proper Names*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Levin, Charles. "Carnal Knowledge Of Aesthetic States." *Body Invaders*. Eds. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker. Montreal: New World

Perspectives, 1987. 99-119.

Levin, David Michael. *The Opening Of Vision: Nihilism And The Postmodern Situation*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1988.

Lewandowska, Marysia, Ed. *The Missing Text: Sight Works, Volume Two*. London: Chance Books, 1991.

Librett, Jeffrey S., Ed. *Of The Sublime: Presence In Question*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

Lydenberg, Robin. "Sound Identity Fading Out, William Burroughs' Tape Experiments." *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, And The Avant-Garde*. Eds. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992. 408-433.

Lykke, Nina. "Between Monsters, Goddesses And Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations With Science." *Between Monsters, Goddesses And Cyborgs*. London: Zed Bks, 1996. 13-29.

---, and Rosi Braidottis, Eds. *Between Monsters, Goddesses And Cyborgs*. London: Zed Bks., 1996.

Lyotard, Jean-François. *Lessons On The Analytic Of The Sublime*. Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

---, "The Interest Of The Sublime." *Of The Sublime: Presence In Question*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993. 109-132.

MacKendrik, Karmen. *Counterpleasures*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.

Marcus, Steven. *Representations: Essays On Literature And Society*. N.Y.: Random House, 1975.

Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros And Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1966.

Marvick, Louis Wirth. *Mallarmé And The Sublime*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986.

Marx, Karl. "A Contribution To The Critique Of Hegel's Philosophy Of Right." *Early Writings*. N.Y.: Vintage, 1975.

Mascia-Lees, Frances, and Patricia Sharpe, eds. *Tattoo, Torture, Mutilation, And Adornment*. N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1992.

Mason, Carol. "Terminating Bodies." *Posthuman Bodies*. Eds. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. 231-243.

Massumi, Brian, ed. *The Politics Of Everyday Fear*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Matthews, J. H.. *Surrealism, Insanity, And Poetry*. N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1982.

Mauss, Marcel. "Techniques Of The Body." *Incorporations*. Eds. Jonathan Crary and, Sanford Kwinter. N.Y.: Urzone Inc., 1992. 454-477.

McGrath, William J.. *Freud's Discovery Of Psychoanalysis: The Politics Of Hysteria*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.

Mitchell, David T., and Sharon Snyder, Eds. *The Body And Physical Difference: Discourses Of Disability*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

Meese, Elizabeth. *(Sem)Erotics: Theorizing Lesbian: Writing*. N.Y.: New York University Press, 1992.

Meindl, Dieter. *American Fiction And The Metaphysics Of The Grotesque*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996.

Merves, Esther S.. "The Invasion Of The Female Body." *The Underside of High-Tech*. Eds. John W. Murphy, Algius Mickunas, and Joseph Pilotta. N.Y.: Greenwood Press, 1986. 67-81.

Moorjani, Angela. *The Aesthetics Of Loss And Lessness*. London: Macmillan, 1992.

Morris, David B.. "Postmodern Pain." *Heterotopia: Postmodern Utopia And The Body Politic*. Ed. Tobin Siebers. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994. 150-171

Moussaieff Masson, Jeffrey. *The Assault On Truth: Freud's Suppression Of The Seduction Theory*. N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1985.

---, and Marianne Loring. *A Dark Science: Women, Sexuality, And Psychiatry In The Nineteenth Century*. N.Y.: Farrar, Strauss And Giroux, 1986.

Muller, Gilbert H.. *Nightmares And Visions: Flannery O'Connor And The Catholic Grotesque*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972.

Murphy, John W., Algis Mickunas, and Joseph Pilotta, Eds. *The Underside Of High-Tech: Technology And The Deformation Of Human Sensibilities*, N.Y.: Greenwood Press, 1986.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Gravity Of Thought*. Trans. François Raffoul and Gregory Recco. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997.

Newman, Charles. *The Postmodern Aura: The Act Of Fiction In An Age Of Inflation*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1985.

Phelan, Peggy. "Dance And The History Of Hysteria." *Corporealities*. Ed. Susan Leigh Foster. N.Y.: Routledge, 1996. 90-105.

---, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1997.

Pfohl, Stephen. *Death At The Parasite Cafe: Social Science (Fictions) And The Postmodern*. N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1992.

---, "Letters In Excess." *Body Invaders*. Eds. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker. Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1987. 255-262.

Pini, Maria. "'Peak Practices' The Production And Regulation Of Ecstatic Bodies." *The Virtual Embodied*. Ed. John Wood. N.Y.: Routledge, 1998. 168-179.

Plotnitsky, Arkady. *Reconfigurations: Critical Theory And General Economy*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993.

Porush, David. *The Soft Machine: Cybernetic Fiction*. N.Y.: Methuen, 1985.

Ragland-Sullivan, Ellie. "Dora And The Name-Of-The-Father." *Discontented Discourses*. Eds. Marleen S. Barn and Richard Feldstein. Chicago: University Of Illinois Press, 1989. 208-239.

Reason, David. "The Vissitudes Of Silence." *The Missing Text*. Ed. Marysia Lewandowska. London: Chance Books, 1991. 27-36.

Rey, Jean-Michel. "Freud's Writing On Writing." *Literature And Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Shoshana Felman. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977. 301-328.

Rifkin, Adrian. "Slavery/sublimity." *The Eight Technologies Of Otherness*. Ed. Sue Golding. London: Routledge, 1997. 145-151.

Rogozinski, Jacob. "The Gift Of The World," *Of The Sublime: Presence In Quesrtion*. Ed. Jeffrey S. Librett. Albany: State University of N.Y. Press, 1993.

Romanyshyn, Robert. *Technology As Symptom And Dream*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1992.

Ronell, Avital. *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

Roof, Judith. *Come As You Are: Sexuality And Narrative*. N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Rose, Jacqueline. "She." *Writing And Psychoanalysis: A Reader*. Ed. John Lechte N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1996. 166-182.

Rosenau, Pauline Marie. *Postmodernism And The Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads And Intrusions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Ross, Kristin. *The Emergence Of Social Space; Rimbaud And The Paris Commune*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

Rubin Suleiman, Susan, Ed. *The Female Body In Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.

---, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, And The Avant-Garde*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Russo, Mary. *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess And Modernity*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1994.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body In Pain: The Making And Unmaking Of The World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Schor, Naomi. *Reading In Detail: Aesthetics And The Feminine*. N.Y.: Methuen, 1987.

Schur, Helen. *Freud: Living And Dying*. N.Y.: International Universities Press, Inc., 1972.

Schwartz, Hillel. "The Three-Body Problem And The End Of The World." *Fragments For A History Of The Human Body Part Two*. Eds. Jonathan Crary, Michel Feher, Hal Foster, and Sanford Kwinter. N.Y.: Urzone Inc., 1989. 406-465.

Schweizer, Harold. *Suffering And The Remedy Of Art*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.

Shaviro, Steven. *Doom Patrols: A Theoretical Fiction About Postmodernism*. N.Y.: High Risk Books, 1997.

---, "Two Lessons From Burroughs." *Posthuman Bodies*. Eds. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. 38-54.

Shepherdson, Charles. "*Adequatio Sexualis*: Is There A Measure Of Sexual Difference?" *From Phenomenology To Thought, Errancy, And Desire*. Ed. Babette Babich. Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995. 445-467.

Showalter, Elaine. *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics And Modern Culture*. N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Siebers, Tobin, Ed. *Heterotopia: Postmodern Utopia And The Body Politic*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.

Sircello, Guy. "How Is A Theory Of The Sublime Possible?" *Journal Of Aesthetics And Art Criticism*. Vol. 51, No.4, Fall 1993. 541-550.

Slade, Joseph W.. "American Writers And American Inventions: Cybernetic Discontinuity In Pre-World War II Literature." *The Technological Imagination*. Eds. Teresa de Lauretis, Andreas Huyssen and Kathleen Woodward. Madison: University of Wisconsin, Coda Press, 1980. 27-48.

Smith, Paul. *Discerning The Subject*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

Sobchack, Vivian. "Beating The Meat/Surviving The Text, Or How To Get Out Of This Century Alive." *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk*. Eds. Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows. London: SAGE Pub., 1995. 205-214.

Sollers, Philippe. "Freud's Hand." *Literature And Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Shoshana Felman. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977. 329-337.

Sontag, Susan. *Illness As Metaphor*. N.Y.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978.

Stacey, Jackie. *Teratologies: A Cultural Study Of Cancer*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1997.

Stevenson, Warren. *Romanticism And The Androgynous Sublime*. London: Associated University Presses, 1996.

Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives Of The Miniature, The Gigantic, The Souvenir, The Collection*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.

Stewart, Suzanne. *Sublime Surrender: Male Masochism At The Fin-De-Siècle*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.

Sussman, Henry. *Psyche And Text*. N.Y.: State University of New York, SUNY, 1993.

Tabbi, Joseph. *Postmodern Sublime: Technology And American Writing From Mailer To Cyberpunk*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Tausk, Victor. "The Influencing Machine." *Incorporations*. Eds. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter. N.Y.: Urzone Inc., 1992. 542-569.

Taussig, Michael. *The Nervous System*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1992.

---, *The Magic Of The State*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1997.

Tazi, Nadia. "Celestial Bodies: A Few Stops On The Way To Heaven." *Fragments For A History Of The Human Body, Part Two*. Eds. Jonathan Crary, Michel Feher, Hal Foster and Sanford Kwinter. N.Y.: Urzone, 1989. 518-552.

Tenaaf, Nell. "Video Technology And The Feminine." *Parallélogramme*. Vol.18 No.3, 1992. 24-37.

Theweleit, Klaus. *Male Fantasies, Volume 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Thomson, Philip. *The Grotesque*. London: Methuen & Co., 1972.

Traub, Valerie. "The Ambiguities Of "Lesbian" Viewing Pleasure." *BodyGuards: The Cultural Politics Of Gender Ambiguit.*, Eds. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub. N.Y.: Routledge, 1991. 305-326.

Turner, Alice K.. *The History Of Hell*. N.Y.: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1993.

Ulmer, Gregory. *Teletheory: Grammatology In The Age Of Video*. N.Y.: Routledge, 1989.

Valéry, Paul. "Some Simple Reflections On The Body." *Fragments For A History Of The Human Body Part Two*. Eds. Jonathan Crary, Michel Feher, Hal Foster and Sanford Kwinter. N.Y.: Urzone Inc., 1989. 394-405

Vernant, Jean-Pierre. "Dim Body, Dazzling Body." *Fragments For A History Of The Human Body Part One*. Eds. Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi. N.Y.: Urzone Inc., 1989. 18-47.

Virilio, Paul. *Open Sky*. London: Verso, 1997.

Voller, Jack G.. *The Supernatural Sublime: The Metaphysics Of Terror In Anglo-American Romanticism*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994.

Walker Bynum, Caroline. "The Female Body And Religious Practice In The Later Middle Age." *Fragments For A History Of The Human Body Part One*. Eds. Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff, and Nadia Tazi. N.Y.: Urzone Inc., 1989. 160-219.

Walker, Lisa. "How To Recognize A Lesbian: The Cultural Politics Of Looking Like What You Are." *SIGN*. Vol.18, No.4, Summer 1993. 866-890.

Walsh, Richard. *Novel Arguments: Reading Innovative American Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Warhol, Robyn. "As You Stand, So You Feel And Are: The Crying Body And The Nineteenth-Century Text." *Tattoo, Torture, Mutilation, And Adornment*. Eds. Frances Mascia-Lees and Patricia Sharpe. N.Y.: State University Of New York Press, 1992. 100-125.

Weiss, Allen S.. "Radio, Death, And The Devil:" Artaud's Pour En Finir Avec Le Jugement De Dieu." *Wireless Imagination*. Eds. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992. 268-290.

Whitehead, Gregory. "The Forensic Theater: Memory Plays For The Postmortem Condition." *The Politics Of Everyday Fear*. Ed. Brain Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. 229-244.

Wicke, Jennifer. "Fin De Siecle And The Technological Sublime." *Centuries' Ends, Narrative Means*. Ed. Robert Newman. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996. 297-315.

Williams, Linda. *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, And The "Frenzy Of The Visible."* Berkeley: University of California, 1989

Wills, David. *Prothesis*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.

Wilson, Rob. "Postmodern As Post-Nuclear: Landscape As Nuclear Grid." *Ethics/Aesthetics: Postmodern Positions*. Ed. Robert Merrill. Washington: Maisonneuve Press, 1988. 169-192.

Winne, Langdon. *Autonomous Technology*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977.

Wiseman, Mary Bittner. ""Beautiful Exiles": "Woman" As Excluded in Kant's *Observations On The Feeling Of The Beautiful And Sublime, 1763." Aesthetics In Feminist Perspective*. Eds. Hilde Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993. 169-178.

Wood, John, Ed. *The Virtual Embodied: Presence/Practice/Technology*. N.Y,: Routledge, 1998.

Wyschogrod, Edith. *Spirit In Ashes: Hegel, Heidegger, And Man-Made Mass Death*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

Yaeger, Patricia. "The 'Language Of Blood': Towards A Maternal Sublime." *Relmagining Women: Representations Of Women In Culture*. Eds. Shirley Neuman and, Glennis Stephenson. Toronto:University of Toronto Press, 1993. 87-110.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Indivisible Remainder*. London: Verso, 1996.

---, *Tarrying With The Negative*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.

---, *Looking Awry*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993.